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A STUDY OF UPWARD BYPASSING IN THE PROCESS OF
VERTICAL CONTROL OF AN ORGANIZATIONAL
COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

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of vertical bypassing on the individual and the organization by using the positive effects of bypassing as a means to strengthen the organizational communication climate and system.

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Having heard an oral defense of the above thesis, the Advisory Committee:

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DEDICATION

To Kari and Matthew Williams

In the hope that some day their ability
to use the communication process effectively
will help eliminate strife and injustice on
our world and thereby make my chosen profession
unnecessary and obsolete.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To a large extent the "ascent of man" can be viewed as a history of the development of human communication. It is the connective process of communication which makes possible the existence and evolution of society itself. Berlo (1960), in The Process of Communication, estimates that the "average American spends about 70 percent of his active hours communicating verbally," and most of his waking hours in some form of communication (pp. 1-2). He also notes that it is typically impossible for people to keep from communicating verbally or non-verbally when they are in the presence of each other, and that the purpose of all this communication is to manipulate some factor or factors in our environment. Berlo says, "in short, we communicate to influence each other" (pp. 12-13). It is our most human behavior.

People are brought together or linked by communication in society in many ways; the ensuing social institutions are formed by people for the attainment of their common or shared goals. Our most basic social systems, such as the family, friendship and other groups, the neighborhood, the community, are formed by means of communication; they are all, in this sense, communication systems. The concept of organizations, however, probably remains the most pervasive and powerful factor in shaping our daily lives.

Richard H. Hall (1976) in Organizations: Structure and Process notes that a very easy way to understand the dominating role of organizations in society is to review a daily newspaper. In almost every article and paragraph of the paper you will find reference to the way we have responded to our environment by means of organizational action (pp. 3-4). Such human activity in organizations is used to coordinate the behavior of people through communication so that they can take cooperative action to achieve the goals they share.

Nearly half-a-century ago, Chester I. Barnard in The Function of the Executive established a position on communication in the organization which Caplow (1976) summarizes as "every organization can be analyzed as a communication network" (p. 50).

This is a study of characteristics which an organizational communication network/system should possess in order to operate at optimum effectiveness, and is specifically focused on "bypassing," a deviation from the normal process of supervisory control through communication in the formal structure of the organization. Bypassing can occur in many different forms but it always involves some tactic for "short-circuiting" the established channels of communication for organizational control. The study is concerned primarily with the tactic of upward bypassing in the chain of vertical control at the lower echelons of organizations. This tactic will be treated in relation to its impact on the structure and functioning of an organizational communication system and will thus be connected to such topics as channels of communication, the climate in communication situations, and role relationships between persons in a work team or functional division of an organization.

The following section will attempt to establish a working vocabulary and to define a set of applicable concepts from the literature on organizational communication. It will present a particular perspective on organization communication selected from established works in that field, and then will attempt to place the subject of this study in that context. Such a basis for the study seems necessary because of the differences among the various approaches currently taken toward the study of organization communication and because of the different usages of common terms.

The Theoretical Context of the Study

Human communication does not simply take place in a vacuum. Following the position taken by Katz and Kahn (1978), human behavior can best be studied within the context of some "social system" such as the family, the friendship group, the neighborhood, the organization, the community, the reference group, the culture or sub-culture (Chap. 1-2 ff.). Each of these "levels" is in effect both a communication system and a sub-system in some larger social system. But until recently the social context of communication has largely been studied toward one of the two extremes: small groups or cultures. Now, within the general study of communication, and especially from a "social systems" viewpoint, a more or less definable field of study has developed around that middle level of "communication systems" called the organization.

This study is an effort to understand by passing a particular type of communication process which occurs within the organization by drawing upon selected concepts from communication theory and organization theory and systems theory. In fact, most of the literature in organizational

communication has been developed around topics common to all three areas and is oriented to the structure of an organization as a communication system, to the functions of communication within that structure, and to the inter-relationship of various sets of "process goals" (sets of idealized characteristics of organization communication). Drucker (1974) says that a fundamental of communication is that "communication is perception" (p. 483). Thus the study of communication and bypassing in terms of communication in the organization is dependent to some degree on how we perceive the act or fact of communication and bypassing. The following set of topics is presented as a necessary context for the study of the bypassing process. It is necessary to see how bypassing occurs in the setting of the communication structure, functions, and goals of an organization. These three aspects of an organizational communication system seem most relevant to our inquiry into bypassing.

Levels of Communication Structure

All communication in an organization can be perceived as occurring between personnel who have come to identify themselves with a position at one or more levels of the organization and within the norms or goals of such level(s).

- (1) The Individual Level in an organization is, of course, the basis of the whole organization since it must to some degree meet his individual needs and goals; within the organization he will communicate with other members from the frame of reference of his own personal value.

- (2) The Work-Team Level is established when organization members

are drawn into groups where they must regularly interact on a face-to-face basis in order to attain the goals shared by that group (e.g., the machine shop operators, the accounting department payroll clerks, the salesmen, the plant foremen as a group, the vice-presidents as a group, a project team, the officers of a club, etc.).

- (3) The Functional Division Level can be viewed as a larger collection of work teams which identify with a common set of duties or functions and in which the work teams are coordinated to achieve a common set of goals. Thus, a business corporation often has functional divisions for marketing, production, personnel, finance, research, etc.
- (4) The Total Organization Level is the interaction of all sub-systems in concert (individuals, teams, divisions) in order to attain and balance out all the sub-goals of the organization; top management primarily assumes that function at this level.
- (5) External Levels involve any other persons, groups or organizations which are not a part of the organization but with whom the organization must interact to achieve its goals. These include customers, competitors, labor unions, government agencies, financial institutions and suppliers, etc.

In any communication event in an organization, each person's behavior will reflect his identification with goals and norms of one or more of these structural levels or their sub-systems; he will communicate from that point of view.

Within the levels or groupings established in the structural level, communication events then take place between individuals based on some set of different and constantly changing role relationships.

Communication Relationships

Within the context of the channels established through the structure of the organization, communication events take place between individuals based on a set of differently perceived and constantly changing role relationships. An event will occur in some predictable "situation" depending largely on which of the following role relationships exist:

- (1) Informal Relationships, interactions between persons who are not acting within their job definitions in the organization. Another way of describing this kind of informal communication event is: two or more persons interacting in a non-role situation.
- (2) Peer Relationships, generally interaction of persons within a specified work team who are equal in status and share both individual and team goals to some degree.
- (3) Vertical Relationships which involve the up and down interaction of superiors and subordinates in the same vertical line of hierarchy within the organization.
- (4) Lateral Relationships in which interaction occurs between two or more persons who report upward in different vertical lines of control (irrespective of status or position). A typical event might involve a waiter in a restaurant (who reports upward to the dining room manager) in an argument with a cook

in the kitchen (who reports upward to the chef, kitchen manager).

- (5) External-Internal Relationships are those where communication takes place between persons inside and those outside the organization system boundaries.

Logically, the differing nature of these role relationships between participants in a communication event will require a different kind of communication behavior in each event.

Communication Function

When communication events or processes are used to achieve different purposes in the organization, we have different functions. In this study we shall use the following classifications of functions:

- (1) The function of sending and receiving information.
- (2) The function of decision making.
- (3) The function of supervision (which would include planning, implementing and controlling work in order to assure goal achievement).
- (4) The function of adapting the internal communication system of the organization to meet the demands of environmental or external change.

The point being made here is that communication behavior varies depending on the communication function it is being used to serve at that time.

Communication Goals

We use communication events in the context of a communication system in order to achieve the substantive goals of the organization and of

all its sub-systems. The following, however, are process goals necessary to the effective operation of an organizational communication system; drawn broadly from the current literature of organization communication, the following process goals would seem representative of the position taken by writers like Likert, Argyris, Blake and Mouton, Goldhaber, Pace and others:

- (1) Supportive (not punitive) relationships between persons in communication, characterized by openness, candor, trust, respect, etc.
- (2) Positive group norms (versus negative) in a climate in which members simultaneously attempt to attain individual goals while striving for team, division and organization goals.
- (3) Participative decision making, a process designed to involve all relevant personnel in the process of setting and adjusting team, division and organization goals, and of making the daily decisions needed to best implement all goals. (The process involves all relevant subordinates without delegating formal authority to them.)
- (4) Win-Win inter-team relationships, a process used to secure cooperative decisions between different teams or divisions; an effort to avoid the more destructive aspects of inter-team conflict and competition which makes the balancing or prioritizing of individual, team, division and organization goals more difficult.
- (5) Openness to learning and receptivity to internal and external evidence of needed change throughout the organization.

The establishment of these criteria help develop an effective organizational communication system. Thus, any communication process like bypassing which inhibits the achievement of these "process goals" would be discouraged.

The Subject of the Study: The
Process of Bypassing

Given the theoretical basis stated above, the subject of this study can now be more precisely described and defined. The inquiry into bypassing focuses on the nature of vertical control. We are fundamentally concerned with the process of upward and downward communication along the vertical lines of formal authority within the hierarchy of the organization in order to exert control, and we will examine the effect of bypassing on all four of the communication functions as they relate to vertical control.

While vertical control can be broadly defined as upward and downward communication in the organization aimed at the pursuit of organization goals, the concept should not be limited to the communication function we named supervision. Organization control is necessary to achieve the desired goals, but "control" must include all the functions of organizational communication (information flow, decision making, supervision and adaptation to change).

To illustrate the process of bypassing and to begin its definition, consider the following example.

As part of routine training requirements, a company commander tells one of his lieutenants to take his platoon to the rifle range to train. The lieutenant informs his sergeant of that plan. During the rifle range

activity, the sergeant observes that the training is not being conducted under proper safety requirements by the lieutenant. The sergeant without talking to the lieutenant informs the company commander, a captain, of the safety violations. In this situation the sergeant has bypassed the lieutenant.

This bypassing may have a destructive effect on the communication system of the entire company. At the structural level the captain, lieutenant and sergeant are operating as a work team, but the normal three-level vertical relationship of superior-subordinate between them has been seriously impaired. The performance of all four communication functions will be affected (information flow, decision making, supervision and adaptation to change), and the whole process of effective vertical control may be endangered.

Specifically, this instance illustrates "upward" bypassing in which a subordinate bypasses his immediate superior to communicate with a higher authority. He has left out the intermediate link in the control chain. But bypassing can and does happen in both an upward and downward direction. Either party can be the originator. The captain may bypass the lieutenant to get information from the sergeant. In either event the continuous spiral of two-way feedback up and down an established line or chain of vertical control has been bypassed. Since the causes and effects of the two types (upward and downward bypassing) seem quite different, since the upward form seems to be more common and more important, and since some limits to the scope of this study are needed, it will deal only with upward bypassing.

Thus bypassing can be considered a deviation from an established chain of vertical control, the traditional chain being at least a two-step or three-level relationship where one or more steps are bypassed and the goal achievement of all individuals and of the organization itself is jeopardized. Aurin Uris (1970) in his book, The Executive Desk-book, states "bypassing is a traditional communications problem in which a manager is, in effect, dropped out of a communication chain" (p. 32).

The Purpose of the Study

This study will examine the nature of the bypassing act, its most common causes, and the most predictable effects it will have on both the individuals involved and on the effectiveness of the communication system of an organization. It will also attempt to examine the possibility that bypassing can sometimes serve constructive purposes; we must consider both the positive and negative effects of bypassing. Our main concern will be the effect of upward vertical bypassing at the lower levels of all organizations, but with some special attention to military units. As possible, we shall apply our conclusions to larger units both in the military and private sector. In a set of summary recommendations we shall attempt to set forth possible programs or policies which managers or military commanders can use to control bypassing.

This set of objectives requires that we directly relate the tactic of bypassing to the main elements of organization communication theory as commonly found in the literature. Thus, this paper will deal with matters of vertical control, more specifically, with the processes used in controlling the spiralling up and down feedback process of vertical

communication in which bypassing occurs, and will place that tactic in the context of organization communication structure, function and goals.

There are two main reasons for selecting this bypassing process as a topic for this study:

- (1) As an Army officer, I have myself bypassed and been bypassed and have personally observed many other bypassing incidents. Very often such incidents seemed to have a significant impact on both the career of the people immediately involved and on the achievement of surrounding organization goals. I am personally concerned with the management of this problem as a career military officer.
- (2) Bypassing as a topic within organizational communication seems, in my personal opinion, to be that strange case of an important topic which does not seem to have generated much specific interest in the academic field. The published research on it is often only tangential; direct, thorough analysis of the nature or effects of bypassing is uncommon. Still, there is a large amount of literature available on vertical communication and most of it has direct implication for bypassing. A summary of various views of bypassing also reveals a number of fairly significant inconsistencies in those views. Thus, it would seem that a direct and thorough analysis of this topic could make a contribution to the literature of organizational communication.

A Review of the Literature

While bypassing must be considered a topic of real concern to the organization manager, it rapidly became apparent that most of the relevant material dealt with vertical communication and that little material had been published directly on the concept of bypassing itself. Some recommendations are available on how it should be managed or what policies should govern it, but even here there are inconsistencies. Most writers argue directly or imply that it should generally be viewed as damaging to the organization. There is a clear need for further analysis concerning bypassing in the literature of both organization theory and communication theory. Chapter II will begin with a representative selection of the information relating directly on bypassing in this literature. The following material describes the broader areas of available material used in this study.

In order to put the concept or definition of bypassing into the context desired for the purposes of this paper, it seemed necessary at the outset to research material from standard text sources which deal with organization communication theory. Particular attention was given to concepts which dealt with the channels or networks used for organization control. Information was also sought concerning power, authority, and hierarchy within the formal structure of an organization. The process of bypassing was studied by analyzing the relationship between bypassing and the fundamental concepts of organizational communication theory such as feedback, climate, goal attainment, and motivation in order to establish the significance of bypassing to current organization communication theory.

In an effort to insure that the initial manual search for material in the Learning Resources Center at this University had not somehow overlooked significant and relevant works in the area of bypassing, two separate computer generated searches of selected data bases were conducted at Memorial Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The data bases which were examined were: Management Contents, an indexing of business related topics published in periodicals since 1974; Inform, an abstracted index of material relating to management and business topics published in periodicals since 1971; Sociological Abstracts, an index from 1963 of material compiled from world-wide literature, including journals, monographs and conference or association reports in the field of sociology and related disciplines; Social Sciences Citation Index, an index to journal literature and book reviews beginning in 1972 for over 2000 journals in the natural and physical sciences for social science related articles; and Dissertation Abstracts 1861+, an index of dissertations from United States, Canadian and European institutions.

In order to conduct the searches of these data bases it was necessary to develop "descriptors" and "descriptor combinations" which the computer used to search titles and abstracts of the material in the data base. The specific descriptors and combinations used included: bypassing, channel-jumping, leap-frogging, organizational communication, chain-of-command, superior-subordinate relations, hierarchy, organization structure, boundary spanning, open door policy, whistle blowing, vertical communication and authority.

The search of Dissertation Abstracts 1861+ was a particular disappointment. A review of dissertations indexed by the search produced no

material immediately relevant to this topic.

In addition to the computer search, a manual search of the Business Periodical Index and indices of a variety of communication and military related journals, such as Proceedings of the Academy of Management, Military Review, Infantry, and Defense was conducted.

The final area from which material was gathered for the study was personal discussions and communications with individuals. In general these sources, from military, business and academic organizations, supported the view that bypassing, as defined for this study, was in fact a real and serious problem and that it had not been given the attention deserved. However, these personal discussions also produced many of the examples of bypassing which are used later in the study.

The Method and Organization of the Study

The broad purposes of the study are developed in Chapters II, III and IV, the substantive body of this thesis; these purposes are to describe and analyze the nature and causes of the bypassing act (to establish some clarity of definition, consistency in and descriptions of it, not now generally available in the literature), to analyze the effects of bypassing on the interpersonal relationships of the superior-subordinates involved and on the effectiveness of the organization communication system, and to review existing policies and practices followed in real life organizations and to make recommendations for bypassing policy based on the conclusions drawn in this study.

Chapter II will begin with an analysis of vertical communication (upward and downward in the hierarchy) and examine how bypassing occurs

in that structural context. Then a selection representative of bypassing incidents will be described and discussed. The reasons for attempting a bypassing act, and the motives of the bypasser will be considered. Then we examine the ways in which bypassing occurs in the course of performing each of four selected communication functions. The objective and method of Chapter II is definition, description and analysis of the bypassing act as drawn from the literature and applied to selected examples.

Chapter III will begin by estimating the impact of bypassing in typical instances on the interpersonal relationships of those most closely involved in the event. This analysis assumes a "three-level pattern" for bypassing: the sergeant (bypasser), the lieutenant (bypassee) and the captain (receiver-superior), and examines the impact of bypassing on each person and relationship in this three-way process. In part, these effects are drawn from the literature and some are inferred from the relationship of bypassing to "other standard" concepts in organizational communication (e.g., serial distortion, role conflict, supervisory style, interpersonal conflict, transaction analysis, etc.). The chapter will then go on to select a set of "process-goals" or criteria or target characteristics of any overall organization communication system, and will infer the probable effects of bypassing on the achievement of these process goals.

Chapter IV will be concerned with communication policy for an organization, both business companies and military organizations, with respect to organizational control, vertical communication and bypassing. It will begin with a review of existing programs and an evaluation of their positive and negative effects. Then we shall try to develop a set of

recommended organization policies and practices for both business and military organizations, and will provide a brief summary of the study.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF THE BYPASSING ACT

Bypassing and Vertical Control in the Organization

One of the most important functions in managing a formal organization is to control and direct the actions of organization members toward simultaneous achievement of both the goals of the organization as a whole and the goals of its individual members. Such control is usually exerted by means of some vertical communication system. Zachary (1982) says that "better communication leads inevitably to better performance. Unfortunately, like so many aspects of a manager's job, better communication is more easily endorsed than accomplished" (p. 32). Control of performance would seem to be a critical factor in any manager's job, especially when inadequate or incorrect performance by an employee can threaten the control which the supervisor has over the process.

The control of an organization is largely accomplished through the communication processes which insure that employees at all levels understand the objectives and policies of the organization and perform accordingly. Such a control process involves a continuing spiral of upward and downward feedback through the vertical hierarchy of the organization. When a person bypasses this normal set of communication channels and role relationships, he challenges the whole process of control and the authority of his superiors to control it (Zachary, p. 31).

The Concept of Vertical Control

As noted in Chapter I, in order to discuss the significance of bypassing it is first necessary to place bypassing in the context of communication for vertical control; that is, communication downward and upward between superiors and subordinates in the established channels and role relationships of the organizational hierarchy. The channels of downward communication are important to the manager in directing the activities of employees but, according to Halatin (1982), upward communication is also important as the means by which a manager can receive feedback on the progress of work as well as on employee feelings and attitudes and receive suggestions for needed changes (p. 7). This upward feedback may be as important as the original downward communication since it provides information to supervisors on the impact of that earlier downward communication, and thus leads to the maintenance of the continuing spiral of feedback needed for coping with continuous change.

The concept of hierarchy within an organization is basic to understanding the structure of that organization. While it might theoretically be possible to create an organization which did not have any recognizable hierarchy, the real-world organization may often have too much, its structure often becomes, with growth, too tall and too complex. Nevertheless, hierarchy within the organization in the formal structure provides the skeleton upon which the communication channels of the organization are built. If, as Hall (1972) notes, the most direct function of hierarchy in the organization is in fact coordination (p. 281), then communication becomes the method of performing such coordination.

In short, it can be said that "control is the feedback system that informs the manager [as to] how well plans are being carried out" and that the communication channels used in this vertical system carry the flow of information required to effect that control (Rosenblatt, Cheatham, and Watt, 1977, pp. 33-34). If the communication channels used for control become blocked or misused, the operation of the control system of the organization is impaired (p. 34). One source of blockage or misuse is when bypassing occurs within the vertical system or network. Thus under normal conditions, we begin by assuming that bypassing will short-circuit the vertical feedback spiral, endanger the control system, and reduce organization goal achievement. David S. Brown (1981) says that "hierarchical systems were established to be used, and those who fail to do so [bypassed them] proceed at their own risk" (p. 2).

As noted in Chapter I, the dangers of bypassing for organizational effectiveness would seem to be obvious, but the issue has been discussed largely in only a non-specific manner by the literature on vertical communication rather than directly in relationship to the deviation called bypassing.* Before making a detailed analysis of bypassing it would seem useful to review the limited materials directly on the bypassing act in the general literature of business management and organization communication. The following items are selected as representative of those

*Perhaps this is because it is only recently that the organizational structure has typically become more complex and problems of control more pressing to managers. As Brown (1981) notes, "in the recent past, most organizations had only three to five levels. Today, some have as many as twelve" (p. 3). Sears, Roebuck took pride, at one time, in maintaining a nation-wide retail store system with only two levels of hierarchy (Drucker, 1974, pp. 575). With this switch to more complex organizations, communication systems and networks had to change as well.

materials. It will be noted that in addition to its scarcity the discussion of bypassing in the literature is unclear on its possible advantages or disadvantages and it will also be clear in the following summary that there are considerable inconsistencies.

The Concepts of Bypassing

Writing in Organization, March and Simon (1958) note that communication within organizations generally traverse established, definite and predictable channels, "either by formal plan or by the gradual development of informal programs." They further state that a rational design for using communication channels "would call for the arrangement of these channels so as to minimize the communication burden" (p. 167). The problem of bypassing seems to be directly related to channel design and usage within the organization; that is, when the design or usage of channels fails to achieve either personal or organizational goals at a satisfactory level, then bypassing is likely to occur.

March and Simon also make the observation concerning communication channels that, "channel usage tends to be self-reinforcing" (p. 167). This would seem to indicate that the tactic of bypassing normal channels, when used successfully, could lead to increased use of the tactic. The result is much like little campus paths which will soon become main traveled student routes if not fenced off; sidewalks ought to be laid down where people need to walk and we should walk on the grass only in exceptional situations.

However, Dyer and Dyer (1965), writing in Bureaucracy Vs. Creativity, note that the chain of command is often viewed as having a certain

sacredness about it. Obedience to its demands can go so far as to prevent the business of the organization from being done (p. 72). The authors suggest that this is a bad practice and recommend that if the chain of command is bypassed then you, as the leader, should not think that something is wrong with your people but rather you should examine the chain itself to see if something might be wrong with it. Bypassing in the chain of command may just mean that some modification of the chain is needed (p. 72).

Dyer and Dyer make the following suggestion for resolving problems with bypassing in the chain of command:

When people complain about the vanishing non-commissioned officer, or the bypassing of foreman, and so forth, one ought to ask "If it is so difficult to keep them in the chain of command, and if it takes such an effort to make people deal with such an echelon, why not eliminate that echelon? Or at least try to institutionalize the bypasses that have developed (p. 79).

This conclusion, however, suggests a situation where new sidewalks are clearly needed based on the frequency of bypassing. But most bypassing seems to occur only for exceptions, not in the ordinary or normal situation.

Pursuing this idea, Downs (1967), writing in Inside Bureaucracy, notes "that distortion of communication is a significant problem with the organizational structure and that one of several methods that managers have to deal with such distortion is to eliminate the middle-man." Downs contends that this can be done by designing and maintaining a "flat" organization or by "various bypass devices" (p. 123).

However, according to Downs, the objective should be to keep the levels of the hierarchy to as small a number as possible. In that

manner, information would be screened and re-transmitted fewer times and distortion would be reduced. He also says that all organizations "contain a number of ways in which officials can bypass the normal chain of command and communicate directly with other officials two or more levels away in the hierarchy" (pp. 121-124 ff.).

Downs argues that there are five major types of bypassing:

- (1) The straight scoop--whereby high level officials contact officials far below them in the hierarchy in order to obtain information "directly from the horse's mouth."
- (2) Check-out-bypasses--designed to test the "waters" before putting new ideas into practice.
- (3) End-run bypasses--intended to get around an immediate superior, because he refuses to communicate your ideas up formal channels.
- (4) Speed-up bypasses--intended to get things done in a hurry by avoiding the slow moving formal channels.
- (5) Co-option bypasses--used by higher level officials to give subordinates a sense of belonging to the "in-councils" of the organization (p. 125).

Of the five types of bypassing listed by Downs, two of them, "the straight scoop" and the "co-option," are similar to what we now call downward bypassing; they do not seem to be directly related to the concerns of a superior when dealing with the upward circumvention of superiors. The other three types ("the check-out bypass," "the end run bypass" and the "speed-up bypass") would seem to have the most serious impact on the vertical communication process and would also be the most

difficult for a superior to handle. This is especially true of the "end-run" which involves the subordinates refusal to use the vertical channels of communication as they were intended and indicates that the subordinate, the bypasser, feels unable to establish a workable relationship with his immediate superior.

The "check-out" bypass and the "speed-up" bypass do not seem to involve the lack of confidence in a supervisors ability to the same extent as does the "end-run" bypass. Rather, they seem to reflect more of an impatience with the slow pace of the system operation than with the working relationship with the people in the system, with the decisions being made, or with the operation of the vertical chain of relationships as a whole. The "check-out" and "speed-up" show that the bypasser is genuinely interested in advancing organization goals, but that he also hopes to get personal rather than team credit for the plan or idea proposed.

These types tend to occur where upward communication in the system has been unresponsive to new methods or ideas proposed by subordinates (Loyalty to Whom," 1962, p. 459-460). Often bypassing is perceived as an isolated eccentric act by a subordinate. But if the superior, when receiving a bypass action, can predict some of the reasons/motives of the bypasser by placing the action into a recognizable type or pattern like the Downs' categories, the superior may be better able to respond more constructively. It would also seem that the impact on the individual at each level of the three-level role relationship would be better understood.

In the book, The Executive Deskbook, Uris (1970) provides an indication that bypassing deserves a much more extensive treatment than it

has been given in the literature by saying that "Bypassing is a traditional communications problem in which a manager is, in effect, dropped out of a communication chain" (p. 32). Uris proposed two ways in which bypassing can occur and argues that both of these endanger the vertical control necessary to effective management:

- (1) Your superior contacts your subordinate without going through you (downward bypassing).
- (2) Your subordinate contacts your boss without your knowledge or permission (upward bypassing).

In the May 1971 issue of Supervisory Management, Moore explains why it is so important to follow the chain of command. He flatly argues that "the consequences of [downward] bypassing a fellow supervisor to deal with one of his subordinates are serious" by citing some examples of consequences (pp. 10-11). He is concerned that "upward bypassing" will deprive the bypassed manager of information needed to make necessary decisions, and increase the risks of failure from inadequate control.

The relationships of power, control and hierarchical position are explored by Evans (1975), who suggests that selective bypassing can result in the reduction of real power in a given position in the organization chart. He also argues that positions which are at the junction of communication channels are often found to be more powerful than positions which function in only one level of the organization hierarchy (p. 257). Presumably, such "junction" positions cannot easily be bypassed. This view seems supported by the research in communication networks (circle, chain, Y, etc.).

The improvement of upward communication as it relates to bypassing is covered very briefly by Baird (1977) in The Dynamics of Organization Communication. He suggests that communication problems in formal channels may be increased when bypassing takes place, particularly if the person bypassed is made fearful or insecure in dealing with the person who did the bypassing. Baird suggests that any bypassing which is necessary in vertical communication should be done in a "non-threatening" manner; the bypassed person should be later reassured by his superior or even by his subordinate (p. 267).

However, Weinstein (1979) in Bureaucratic Opposition dealing with information flow, notes that bureaucratic opposition which is a polite reference to bypassing may backfire on the person doing the bypassing when the superior, the bypassed person, finds out about it. While it is generally acknowledged that bypassing can be dangerous, it is also acknowledged that sending some messages all the way up through the required channels of a "tall structure" does not always make good sense. In addition, it seems clear that the real power in the organization may be exerted in informal ways and not always be accurately reflected by the organization chart (p. 63). However, according to Weinstein, one of the biggest problems which faces the bypasser is that of gaining credibility. Individual bypassers may be labeled as "trouble-makers," but when several members of a group who are well respected perform bypassing together they may be viewed more positively and may even gain from it as long as they do not "become a mob" (p. 65).

It would seem that the literature on bypassing reflects a variety of differing views of its causes and of its effects on the communication

system of an organization. In an attempt to generalize from all these views it now seems necessary to present and analyze actual instances of bypassing in order to get at a clearer description and analysis than is available in the literature. This will be accomplished in part by presenting a set of bypassing incidents selected to represent the variety found in the literature and in conversations with managers and military commanders. The next part will be an attempt to infer from them a general description of bypassing.

A Review of Representative Bypassing Incidents

The following summary of a bypassing incident is reported in an unsigned letter to the editor of Personnel Journal (October 1962, pp. 459-60). Having learned of a number of different improvements in productive efficiency successfully used in various other plants, a young engineer reasoned that it would be possible to combine these improvements into a single production process in his own plant and make a 20 percent improvement in productive efficiency.

He worked out many of the "bugs" in the new plan directly with people in various other production departments and only afterward presented the detailed plan to his boss. The boss, however, had already heard of the new plan and was furious that it had not first been presented to him. The boss ". . . promptly shot the entire project full of holes and forbade his subordinate to pursue the matter further." Because the plan had also been angrily discredited by the boss to other production supervisors, it seemed impossible to persuade them to support it either. The boss did everything possible to discredit the young

engineer and to make him appear incompetent.

Convinced the plan was worth a great deal of money to the organization, the engineer ". . . prepared to go over his boss' head to the plant manager." The boss, upon learning of this maneuver, ". . . threatened to fire him for disloyalty and incompetence if he did not resign." In exchange for a glowing letter of recommendation, the young engineer agreed to resign and left for another job.

This example points out one of the main characteristics of bypassing incidents; the bypasser is viewed as clearly disloyal to his immediate superior and even in some cases to his organization. In this example, however, it would seem that the young engineer simply put loyalty to higher levels of the organization ahead of loyalty to his immediate superior and to the level of his own special "work team" in the organization. This is often a serious dilemma for employees, because loyalty to the organization among lower level employees is usually not as well rewarded as loyalty to their immediate superiors, those who control their careers in the organization (p. 459).

In this case the employee "was subverting his boss," and in the boss' opinion, at least, attempting to make a name for himself at the expense of the proper channels of authority in the company (p. 460). This allegation may also be true, but as a result of his boss' reaction, the employee was able to get another good job, and the organization lost his ideas; it "might have benefited from a real gain in efficiency through this young man's new system" (p. 460), but it might also have suffered a real loss of effective control if they had allowed the bypassing to multiply. We simply do not know if the idea could or would have been

developed through established channels.

One of the most extensively detailed case studies of bypassing in the literature is reported by Rowan (1983, pp. 46-56). While this bypassing incident involves a very large corporation, it seems to reflect the reaction to and consequences of bypassing activity likely to occur in any size organization.

"For two years, beginning in late 1975, David Edwards went to his boss, and then to his boss' bosses, all the way up the Citibank hierarchy But every time he tried to warn officers of the bank that big trouble was brewing, . . ." his portent of costly civil, perhaps criminal, charges of fraud, et al. against the organization were dismissed, or at least ignored.

In the beginning Edwards assumed that the men at the top didn't know what was going on. He kept unraveling threads of the mystery, and toting his evidence from Paris to London and finally to Citibank headquarters in Manhattan

He was confident he was doing the right thing. "It never occurred to him . . . he was going to get fired." The dismissal notice said "You have acted in a manner that is detrimental to the best interest of Citibank."

In his quest to protect the organization goals and profits of the organization, but perhaps also to reap personal recognition, Edwards said "If I just keep going, somebody'll shake my hand and say 'David Edwards, you did the right thing.'" In this case, Edwards perhaps incorrectly perceived true organization goals. He was naive about the ethics under which the "big-time money market works." Still, Thompson Von Stein, the SEC lawyer assigned to investigate Citibank, wrote, "David Edwards was the

individual in Citibank who made this case possible. He tried to get his suspicions investigated, and the questionable practices changed, and was fired for doing so. This agency and the U.S. government owe him a debt."

During the course of this example, Edwards bypassed the entire hierarchical structure of Citibank, including:

- (1) his boss, Charles Young.
- (2) Edwin Pomeroy, Chief Foreign Exchange auditor.
- (3) Freeman Huntington, Senior Vice President.
- (4) Thomas Theobald, Executive Vice President.
- (5) Walter Wriston, Chairman of the Board.
- (6) The Board of Directors.

Edwards even sent a copy of his report-to-the-board to the SEC. The results of this bypassing action were: Edwards was fired; Citibank continues to be investigated by several governments, and it faces or has faced potential civil and criminal litigation.

Since Nixon and the Watergate affair, there have been a whole series of incidents in which someone in a federal agency has bypassed his superiors to report behaviors or practices which seemed inappropriate, unethical, immoral or even downright criminal. Most of these are cases of "external bypassing." These have occurred even in the face of the might of the whole Washington bureaucracy and with the knowledge that such activity might mean political suicide or criminal conviction. While Ernie Fitzgerald and the C5A is one of the most widely known incidents, it is by no means a singular example. The problem of "whistle blowing" or bypassing has become so prevalent that CBS Television recently detailed the situation in a half-hour telecast. In some cases "bypassing" may be

motivated by an unworthy desire for personal revenge and private gain. In other cases negative feedback through bypassing may actually be useful when higher authority needs to make corrections to the system. Presumably, many managers announce an "open door" policy toward subordinates for this reason; they feel bypass channels are needed to assure upward feedback because middle managers would be fearful of reporting bad news. But it should be equally clear by deliberately encouraging such a bypass policy they are also encouraging the disruption of necessary lines of vertical control, and risking a breakdown in whole networks based on the trusting relationship on which effective organization communication depends. It may be that "you can't have it both ways."

Clearly, bypassing is not a situation which is limited to large or small companies, nor only to private business, organizations, nor to government agencies, etc. Instances could be cited where it takes place in all kinds of organizations, including non-profit, community and volunteer organizations. It is also a problem in military organizations (one of the main concerns of this paper). Brown (1981) notes that "a senior officer in the military has no hesitation [sic] in going to the person or place where he or she feels there is a need" He also notes that "the availability of the telephone has made it simple and quick to call someone at another level in the organization to get an answer to a question that has arisen" (pp. 4-5).

As the company commander of a military police company in South Korea, I used the telephone to bypass my immediate supervisor in order to get information that was needed to carry out a mission that had been given to my unit. While this is bypassing, it is of a type which was generally

accepted, because of the nature of the situation, and because my immediate superior was informed of the action as soon as he could be contacted. In most cases, bypassing seems to cause little difficulty when (1) permission has been secured and (2) the outcome of the bypass is fully reported as soon as possible. But these are not the typical bypass problem cases.

At this point, it may be possible to draw together some of the main ideas developed above and apply them to company-sized military organizations. Let us envision a situation where a young Operations Sergeant for an infantry company has received orders from the First Sergeant to conduct troop training in a new, somewhat unusual and controversial manner. Insecure and unhappy with the situation, he goes to his Company Commander who immediately recognizes the frustration and concern felt by the Sergeant and tells him that the situation will be reviewed.

As a consequence of this conversation, the Company Commander calls in the First Sergeant and says that it had been his intention to have the whole matter discussed at a later time by all officers and non-coms concerned before actually performing the new training with the troops. Angered by the rebuke from the Company Commander, however, the First Sergeant called in the Operations Sergeant and asked why he had been bypassed, what right he had to go directly to the Commander. The First Sergeant argued that he had given direct orders and expected any questions on them to come directly to him. The First Sergeant did not indicate that he had misunderstood and inaccurately reported the Commander's intent. Instead he accused the Operations Sergeant of not trusting him and not being loyal to him and of questioning a direct order.

This incident of bypassing might have proved damaging to future efficiency reports and the Operations Sergeant's whole Army career; it also probably left him bitter and disgruntled, and seriously altered the future relationship and process of communication between the two sergeants. It would also affect the future relationship between the Commander and the First Sergeant, creating distrust and suspicion, quite possibly causing the Company Commander to question his control of the company and especially to doubt the quality of future feedback to him from below. This example can now serve as a starting point as we search for a usable definition and description of bypassing, especially in military organizations.

An Analysis of the Bypassing Act

Communication channels (vertical, lateral, peer or external) are obviously intended to carry a variety of written, oral and other kinds of communication. Within the channels of vertical communication, messages can generally be described as flowing, either upward or downward, depending on who initiates the event. Both upward and downward communication events are important, but with respect to bypassing, it seems clear that the upward flow of events, often treated simply as feedback to downward communication, might be the central issue in organization control. In this sense, the effectiveness of the downward flow of messages from a superior to his subordinate seems to be contingent on his ability to receive and favorably react to the upward flow of feedback from them; this is the essence of a "control system." If the upward flow is blocked or ignored, the effectiveness of future downward communication

and the effectiveness of organization control is placed in jeopardy. Thus, bypassing in this chain of upward feedback seems of crucial importance to organization control.

In just this way, as we have noted earlier, bypassing can occur in the downward flow of communication when a superior, in the absence of adequate upward feedback, bypasses a subordinate in order to get needed information from those in still lower echelons. Again, it seems possible to argue that this downward bypassing would not, in most cases, affect the whole spiral of up and down communication as seriously as upward bypassing. The loss of security, trust, and confidence and of effective feedback which could result from a downward bypass by a superior simply does not seem likely to be as severe as when the bypassed person is truly threatened by both superiors and subordinates in the upward bypass tactic. The position of the First Sergeant in the illustration above indicates that he may face serious estrangement from both the Captain above and the Operations Sergeant below as a result of the upward bypass event.

Another kind of bypassing is sometimes alluded to, again without extended analysis in the literature, which can be called "lateral" bypassing. In this situation (Scott, 1982) a salesman without the knowledge of his sales manager, arranges for the delay of a shipment to a customer by "making a deal" with a production foreman, who does so without the knowledge of his own superior, the production manager. In this case, both subordinates have bypassed their superiors, undercut their authority, and failed to supply needed upward feedback. In these ways they have broken the line of information, compromised future decision making, and short-circuited the lines of supervision and control. The effects

of "lateral bypassing" are much like those of upward bypassing and different from those of downward bypassing; they challenge the authority of superiors and subvert their role functions.

A close examination of lateral bypassing would show that what such a person is really doing is trying to coordinate two fully separate lines of vertical information flow by crossing over at the lowest possible level, bypassing those managers above. Ideally, the coordination would flow up each of the communication lines separately to a point where the two channels which require coordination meet in a single superior and would then cross over and flow downward to all the appropriate points in the opposite line. When a person bypasses these upward communication lines to coordinate with another person in a different line the effect is that all the superiors at higher levels in both vertical communication lines have been bypassed, and serious problems could result in decision making from this failure to provide needed feedback up both lines. The same argument can be made relative to "external bypassing." The difference is that the information flow has bypassed all the internal supervisors and gone outside the confines of control of the organization altogether. This form of bypass violates the trusting relationship within the entire organization and is usually regarded as organization treason.

When considering lateral or external bypassing, we can return to Fayol's concept of a horizontal bridge connecting two different vertical lines of communication and control. Fayol (1949) felt that time and distortion could be reduced if a system to bridge the gap between lines of communication could be established at lower levels (p. 34), but Allen (1977) argues that Fayol's bridge would bring about the loss of control

and a weakening of authority in the system which was discussed above (p. 78).

Thus bypassing in the larger sense is the act of communicating outside the authorized channels and in doing so some critical links in the communication chain are left out. This pattern of leaving out links is equally true of vertical, lateral, and external bypassing. As noted in Chapter I, this thesis is limited to upward vertical bypassing since it is believed to be more common and to have more serious consequences, and also because the scope of this study must be limited. We turn now to a more intensive analysis of the upward bypassing act (the sergeant bypassing the lieutenant by going to the captain), and to the motives or reasons for such acts.*

Motives or Reasons for the Bypassing

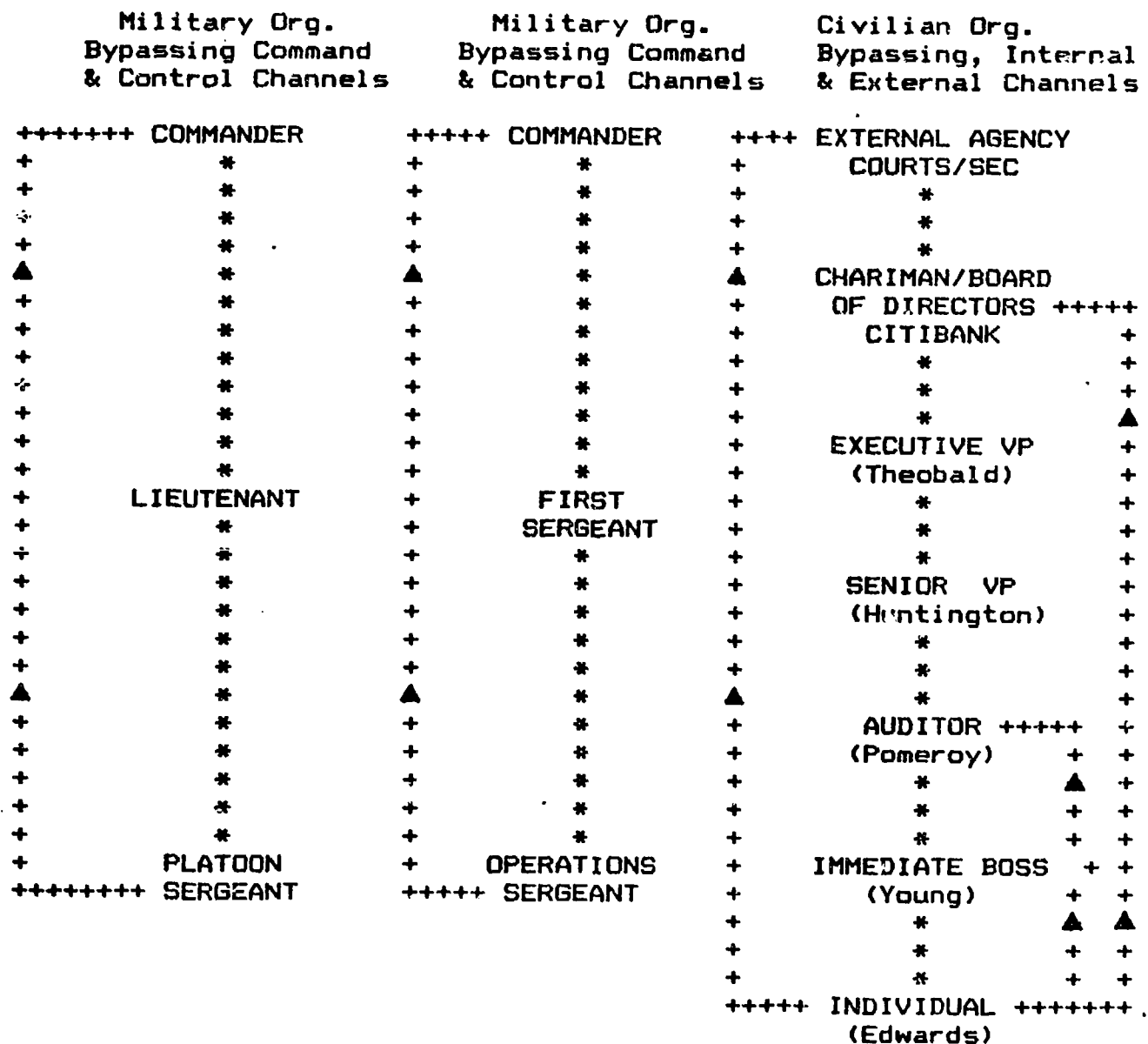
Perhaps the first place to begin in developing an understanding of bypassing (upward vertical bypassing) is with the motives of people involved in initiating the bypassing tactic. When these motives of the bypasser are understood it will be easier for all of the subordinate and superior participants in bypassing to react more constructively, to better cope with this aspect of the organization communication process.

It is probably possible to develop any number of different classification systems into which the motives, causes or reasons why one person bypasses another person could be grouped. Bypassing can occur in a bewildering variety of circumstances. In the article, "Don't Play

*For a graphic representation of the concepts of bypassing addressed in the above section, refer to the charts of Figures 1-3. These charts illustrate the complexity of bypassing as the organization communication system becomes more complex.

Figure 1

BYPASSING THE FORMAL LINES OF CONTROL & COMMUNICATION



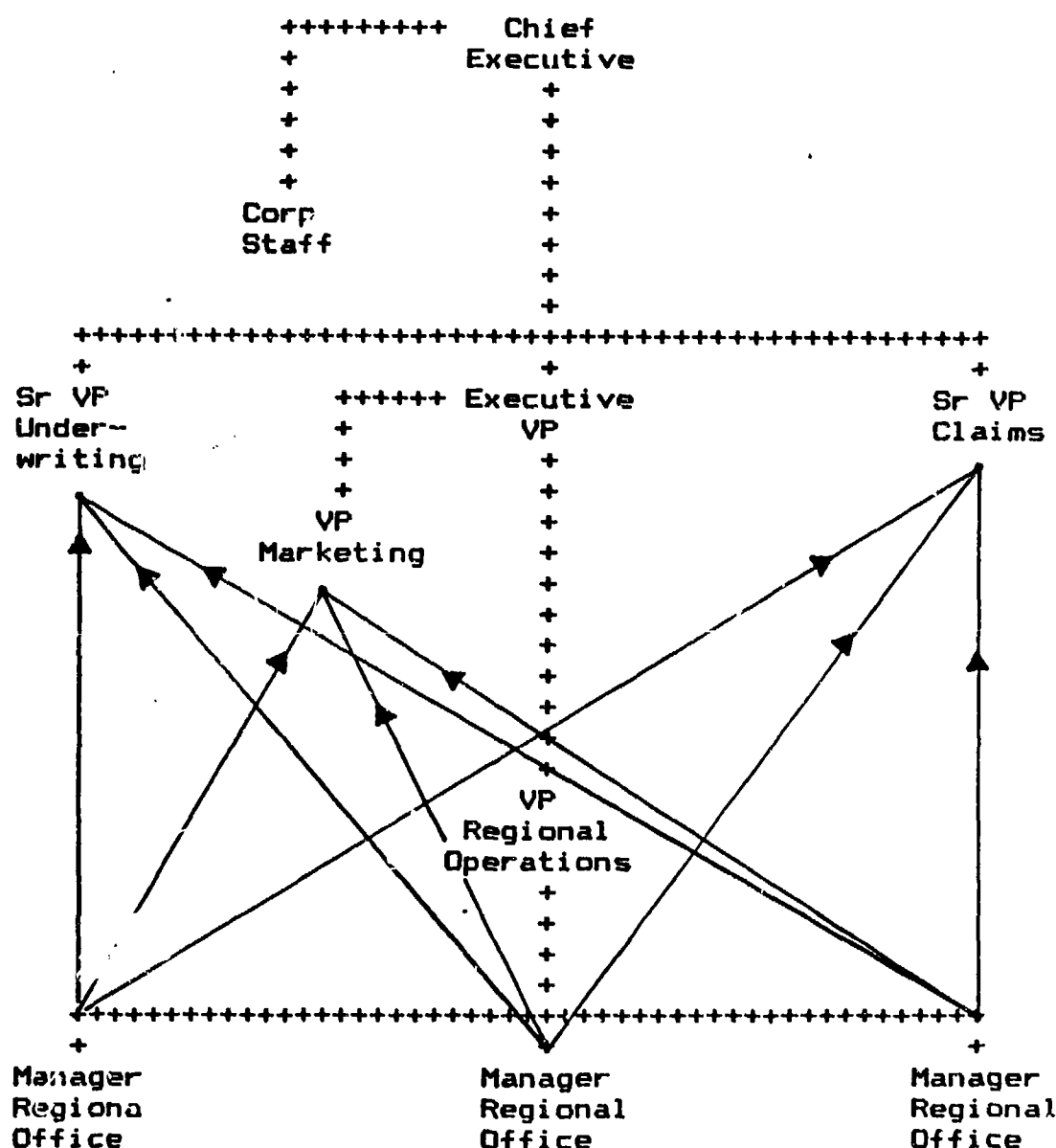
Formal channels of communication and control *****

Bypassing route ++++++▶

This chart illustrates organization communication and control ideas in formal organizations which have clearly defined and generally a very vertical nature.

Figure 2

ORGANIZATION CHART BYPASSING A HIERARCHICAL LEVEL



Normal Organization Communication and Control ++++++

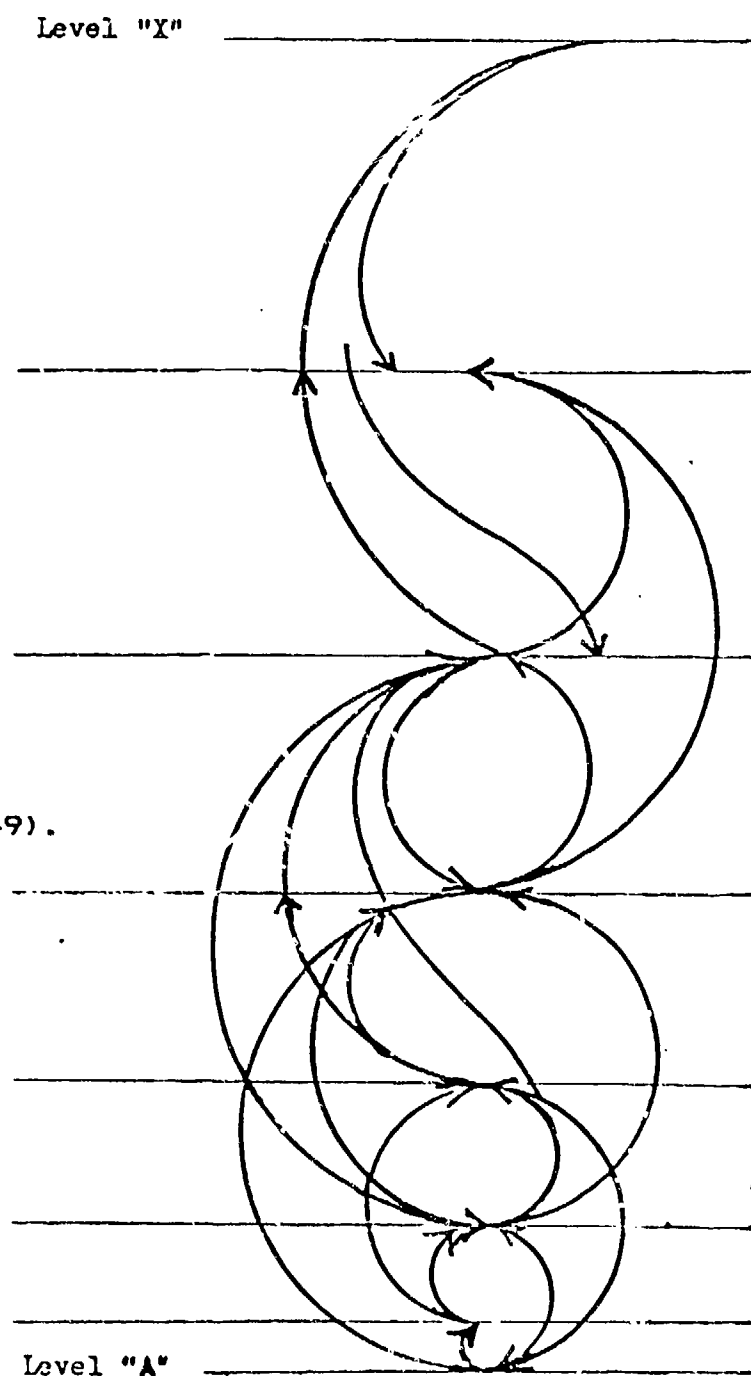
Bypassing Normal Channels →

This chart illustrates the nature of the communication flow, bypassing and power (control) relationships as the organizational communication system becomes more complex. Chart adapted from Evans (1975, p. 256).

Figure 3

COMMUNICATION AND BYPASSING IN THE COMPLEX ORGANIZATION

This chart illustrates the flow of communication and bypassing in a large complex organization composed of many hierarchical levels. Level "A" is the lowest with level "X" being the highest. While a specific number of levels are represented in the illustration an organization could have any number of levels. The spiralling nature of upward, downward, and bypassing communication is depicted by the arrows moving between and through levels from one level to another and back again. Chart adapted from Harriman (1974, p. 149).



Leapfrog with the Organizational Chart," Heming (1973) lists 19 motives, causes or reasons which could result in bypassing within the organization communication system (pp. 18-19). This list, compiled during an industrial management conference, represents many of the motives, causes or reasons which those managers believed were the main causes of bypassing. This list, as well as some additional motives, causes or reasons drawn from other sources, is referenced below.

Bypassing occurs:

- (1) When it is necessary to get things done faster.
- (2) When it is easier to instruct the operator than to train a supervisor.
- (3) When there is an emergency.
- (4) When the supervisor tries to corral more responsibility.
- (5) When an employee has excessive ambition to get ahead, by fair means or foul.
- (6) When supervisors are so hard to deal with they invite being bypassed by superiors and subordinates.
- (7) When the supervisor has differences with another supervisor on the same level, and bypasses him/her to avoid personal contact.
- (8) When misunderstanding exists between supervisor and subordinate, and the subordinate goes to the supervisor's boss to tell the story.
- (9) When the channel jumper wants to punish or discipline the person jumped.
- (10) When the subordinates feel that they are being held back by their supervisor or that their ability is being overlooked.
- (11) When subordinates are afraid of some specific action by their immediate supervisor.
- (12) When subordinates feel that their supervisor is either over-critical or unfair.

- (13) When subordinates feel that their supervisor is not doing the job or not making the right decisions.
- (14) When the superior feels that the supervisor is not carrying out the instructions.
- (15) When the superior lacks confidence in the supervisor's ability.
- (16) When the entire organization has fallen into the habit of channel jumping.
- (17) When the jumper is ignorant of chain of command, protocol or procedure.
- (18) When position specifications, job descriptions and organization charts are so muddled that the lines of authority are not clear.
- (19) When a superior steps in to issue orders or to correct difficulties during the supervisor's absence.

The following reasons for bypassing are drawn from sources other than Heming, and are added here to make our tentative list of motives for bypassing more complete.

- (20) The subordinate is aware of some illegal or immoral occurrence in the organization which the supervisor is a participant in or is deliberately avoiding involvement with.
- (21) When a subordinate is unable to obtain clear directions from a superior or when subordinates legitimate questions go unanswered.
- (22) When a superior becomes overly familiar with a single or a group of subordinates to the exclusion of other subordinates.
- (23) When the subordinate in a state of excessive exuberance forgets to inform the superior.

There is probably an almost endless number of other possible motives but most others would not be significantly different from those listed. Let us, therefore, assume these as a representative list.

Bypassing and the Function of Communication

As noted above, the main impact of bypassing is on the communication function we have called information flow; as such, it is probably the most basic function of the communication system in any organization. But information flow must also be used in turn as managers make decision and both information flow and decision making must then be used in the process of supervision and in the process of adjusting to external changes which affect the organization. Some analysis of how bypassing occurs in the course of performing these communication functions should help us to clarify our view of the significance of bypassing to managers of an organization communication system.

Bypassing and Information Flow

The flow of information through the organization is one of the most critical aspects of every day operations. It is impossible for one section of an organization to know how to move forward toward achievement of goals of the organization if it does not have accurate information on what the other sections are doing. Thus, information flow is the key to effective coordination, which is central to the manager's job. Put another way, the efficient control of work flow depends on information flow.

Within the military organization the importance of information flow may be even more critical. On the modern battlefield, information must flow quickly and with the least distortion possible. Commanders as well as sergeants must have up-to-date battle information if they are going to respond appropriately to quickly changing combat conditions. The information flow in the military organization in combat cannot be a one-way

affair; as we noted above it is just as important, perhaps more so, that the General should receive up-to-date, accurate feedback from the front lines as it is for the soldier on the front lines to know what the General has ordered him to do. As in any organization, change of all kinds is the critical issue, and coping with it efficiently is the main task of a communication system, and effective information flow is the basis for that efficiency.

On the modern battle field it may sometimes become necessary for bypassing to take place; however, this must be an exceptional case and not the rule (RB 101-5, 1968, pp. 1.3-1.6). In any size military organization, and especially in the smaller company units, it will not be uncommon for a support section of the unit to bypass the formal chain of command and communicate directly with another support section in the unit. This is because time and access are such critical factors in accomplishment of unit missions. The time that it would take to go up the chain with requests for approval would sometimes cause such intolerable delay in the operation that no action could in fact be taken in time.

A policy on such bypassing should be clearly understood by all personnel (See Chapter IV) and the commander would later be advised of these actions during the normal course of mission briefings. For the military unit, the importance of information flow lies in the accomplishment of the mission, and the achievement of organization goals. However, if a commander is bypassed by a subordinate in the flow of information, he may activate an inappropriate plan because he lacks that critical piece of information, and even a short time delay may destroy his effectiveness. Both these eventualities must be considered, and the decision as to when

organization goals are best served by information flow bypassing is always a matter of judgment.

Decision Making and Bypassing

The function of decision making, while it is dependent in turn on the accumulation of timely and accurate information, can be even more critical to an organization communication system than the function of information flow. Within the military organization decision making is one of the key aspects of command and control. Many people can make decisions, but only one person, the Commander, is finally responsible for all those decisions, and thus a Commander at any level is dependent on the quality and timeliness of input from his subordinates. Any bypassing act that may occur in the decision making process can be particularly dangerous; it may drop out a key person who should have input on the decision, a Commander at any significant operating level, and could have very serious repercussions. Such an act could have effects through the entire organization and seriously jeopardize the lives and missions of many people.

In any organization the key to its functioning lies in (1) the division of labor (job specialization) and how clearly the separate tasks are structured, and (2) the process of coordination or how effectively the "work flow" is structured. In this sense the function of "information flow" in a communication system is to maintain a smooth flow of routine interactions; work flow is dependent on information flow. But change is the way the world works, and any routinized work flow must be continually altered or corrected as unplanned change occurs. This process of adjust-

ment in the internal work flow of an organization we have called decision making. We shall call our fourth function "adjustment to external change," since it is a similar process, dealing with changes in all the outside elements in the relevant environment of the organization.

In both these processes (decision making and change adaptation) bypassing can occur. It can take the form where some decisions made by a superior are carried by a subordinate up to a higher echelon for reconsideration or reversal. It may also occur before the "middle man" has even had a chance to make a decision. And, of course, all of this decision making is dependent on the information necessary to it. In these ways, bypassing can in some cases be perceived as necessary and useful and in other cases unnecessary and destructive.

Supervision and Bypassing

Information flow and decision making are elements or functions of communication within the organization on which the function of supervision rests. Supervision as a function incorporates the elements of information flow and decision making and blends them into the process of planning, implementing and controlling work in the organization. Supervision at least in a military organization is very closely tied to the art of leadership. Supervision also involves determining work, monitoring feedback, and taking follow-through action to assure organizational and individual goal achievement. Bypassing can either seriously damage or serve that function as well.

In the military organization, a leader who fails in the function of supervision can expect to be bypassed by his subordinates because con-

fidence in the leaders' ability is placed in doubt. When such a leader is bypassed but still remains a participant in the chain of information flow and decision making his capacity to supervise effectively is very seriously reduced. All the comments made about information flow and decision making above also apply to supervision.

Adapting to Change and Bypassing

Because adapting to change is both an internal and external function and also because it requires simultaneous use of the other three functions, it presents the most visible and potentially significant area in which causes or reasons for bypassing may be grouped. The other three functions are thoroughly and continuously mixed in this functional area. Thus, a breakdown in communication in this function will impact on the operation of the other functional areas in a critical way. In our discussions of lateral and external bypassing earlier we noted how seriously "organization treason" must be viewed.

The purpose of this chapter has been to define, describe, and analyze the nature of the process of bypassing, and to provide some explanation of how and why it usually occurs. We have reviewed the concept of vertical communication, analyzed a number of typical instances of bypassing, represented a number of possible motives which may cause bypassing, and examined how bypassing occurs in the performance of the main functions of communications in an organization. We turn now, in Chapter III, to examine the impact of bypassing on the individuals immediately involved and on the communication system surrounding them.

CHAPTER III

THE IMPACT OF BYPASSING ON THE ORGANIZATION COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

The broad objective of Chapter II was to identify, describe and analyze the nature of the process of "bypassing" in upward vertical communication systems. The focus of this chapter will be to take that analysis of bypassing one step further by inquiring into how bypassing affects both the individuals immediately involved and the longer range functioning of the immediate communication system surrounding them. It is hoped that this material will provide a manager with tools to use in shaping communication policy among superiors and subordinates in his organization so as to avoid the destructive results of bypassing, to minimize the negative and maximize the positive effects of that process. Because bypassing will probably occur with varying frequency in most organizations despite efforts to prevent it, organization managers need to better understand the causes and effects of bypassing in order to develop constructive organization policies concerning it.

The analysis presented in Chapter II makes clear that bypassing as viewed from the perspective of the four communication functions selected will make changes in both the role relationships among the immediate participants in the three-level bypass process, and in the functioning of the organization communication system as a whole. In addition, it appears that bypassing can have serious effects on the various elements in the

"climate" of that system. The main purpose of this chapter is to inquire into these probable effects of bypassing.

In most of the "standard" literature on organizational communication, and especially on upward communication within the formal channels of the organization's hierarchy, the behavior of members of the organization is viewed in terms of the quality of their "role relationships" with one another. Upward vertical communication provides feedback through a chain of role relationships to higher echelons which is needed in performing the four communication functions described in Chapter II. These functions, according to Caplow (1976) are used in turn to establish and attain organizational goals through a properly functioning organization communication system (p. 49-50). When this system and especially the vertical feedback subsystem is disrupted by a "bypass" (the circumvention of established formal upward communication channels), then the entire system and particularly the normal upward chain of dyadic superior-subordinate relationships is affected, becoming triadic.

An interesting illusion about superior-subordinate relations is that the higher ranking person in that dyadic relationship has only the single role--that he is a "superior." But almost every superior in an organization also has his superior with whom he plays the role of subordinate. As developed in Likert's "linking-pin" theory, nearly everyone is a member of at least two teams in one of which he is the superior and in the other the subordinate. That is, the superior will at some point operate in the role relationship of a subordinate to some higher echelon. Even in the case of the highest level manager, still another level, that of forces outside the organization, will exert pressure on him as though he

were a subordinate.

Thus, analysis of bypassing can not focus solely on a single form of dyadic superior-subordinate relationship, but, by the very nature of the process, must first be perceived as a three-level two step relationship, and then finally as a whole chain of relationships up through the several steps in a vertical communication subsystem. It is in this "linking-pin" context that we must analyze the impact of the bypass action on the organization communication system and on the individuals involved.

Thus, we need to see the effects of bypassing on this chain of role relationships; however, in order to see such relationships another qualification becomes necessary. A bypass, as previously discussed, involves the circumvention of established communication channels, or the "elimination" of a manager from the flow of communications. However, an upward vertical bypass should not be viewed as taking place only between level "A" and "C" (bypassing level "B"). An upward vertical bypass may proceed from level "A" (the lowest level, or the level of the bypasser) to level "D", or "E", or "X" (the highest level of the organization). Clearly, the bypasser can jump over any number of intermediate levels.

While bypassing several levels of the hierarchy is possible, our spacing analysis of the impact of bypassing does not need to be expanded beyond the initial three-level relationship. It seems likely that a bypassing event in which several intermediate levels may be bypassed will probably produce a reaction from the superior level quite similar to the reaction of a superior in a simple "A"- "B"- "C" triadic bypass, and the same is probably true of the effect of bypassing on the other two members

of the triad as well.*

Because upward vertical bypassing proceeds from down to up, from bypasser upward, and impacts on the up side first (on the receiver-superior), we shall analyze the effects of the bypassing process in that order. The following sections of this chapter will discuss the impact of the bypassing tactic, first, on the receiver of the bypass, then on the bypassed, and finally on the bypasser himself. The remainder of the chapter will then examine the impact of bypassing on the communication system surrounding these persons by estimating its effects on the achievement of the most common process goals of that organization communication system.

The Effects of Bypassing on the Individuals Involved

Impact on the Receiver of a Bypass

Several of the examples of bypassing available in the literature indicate that such a tactic is perceived by the superior as clear evidence that something must be seriously wrong in the structure of his downward control system. He tends to see any situations as serious which would cause the bypasser to bring the situation directly to him instead of sending it up the vertical communication structure (Brown, 1981, p. 2). Hays and Thomas (1967) note that a subordinate in a military organization will be very fearful both of bypassing his immediate superior and of approaching higher authority through an unapproved channel. This fear will usually clue the superior that a potentially serious problem exists which

*Hereafter, for more convenient reference, we shall refer to the lowest member of a bypassing event "A" as the bypasser, the middle member "B" as the bypassed and the superior member "C" as the receiver or receiver-superior.

caused the subordinate to "bypass" the normal channels of communication in which he would presumably feel safer and more comfortable (p. 87). Vogel (1967) writes that military subordinates are usually fearful of speaking-up-to or bringing problems to superiors because of a "fear of retaliation and remoteness of the superior" (p. 20).

In the bypassing events studied, when a superior becomes involved in the bypassing process as the receiver several results usually seem to occur: first, as noted above, the superior will recognize that a potentially serious problem exists in the vertical role relationships of his command; second, the superior will realize that some positive action must be taken. He tends to feel that if no action is taken, the whole situation will certainly get worse; it will not go away. The bypasser, if the receiver doesn't act, will lose confidence in the ability or the willingness of the superior to resolve this problem or future problems involving these individuals of their work team. Thus the receiver usually sees that he must take some action.

In addition, the superior in our examples usually sees that if his behavior seems acceptive or receptive to the tactic the bypasser may believe his behavior is approved and be tempted to bypass again in the future under similar circumstances. Thus a superior is reluctant to indicate approval of the bypassing. On the other hand, if he takes disciplinary action against the person who has bypassed, then the problem will still exist and his relationship with the bypasser will further deteriorate. So, if the bypasser's action, as perceived by the superior, seems honest, the superior will probably accept the bypass "neutrally" and then try to plan future action to both solve the problem and also to

prevent recurrence of the bypassing. In short, the superior in most cases will probably feel that bypassing tactics may not be acceptable practice but that punishment would probably generate additional problems with the bypasser and his peers, and make the resolution of the original problem with the bypassed more difficult.

Any positive action which the superior might take will usually be preceded by an effort to explore the details of the actual situation and to learn as much as possible of its background. Thus, the superior has two options: the first is to discuss the matter promptly with the bypassed individual, and the second is to bring both bypasser and bypassed together so that he can force a triadic confrontation in his presence. As Caplow (1976) suggests, the superior should make the triad meet, to "insist on bringing in the persons involved and conducting all further discussions in this open conference" (p. 65). The bypass indicates some problem in the subordinate vertical communication system, and the objective of the superior is to discover more about that total situation, especially as to whether or not this incident is an isolated one or is endemic in their role relationships. A small and isolated incident involving only two or a few people might be handled quickly with full and frank feedback to both the bypasser and the bypassed during a triad meeting. In this way it might be easily and quickly managed; a complex situation involving several subordinates with evidence of multiple problems and of relatively long standing could not be simply managed, but resolution of the conflict will still require the superior to research the background of the conflict with all concerned.

The bypass situation will often create a series of subsequent problems in many cases, however, no matter which of various responses the superior-receiver makes. When the Sergeant bypasses the Lieutenant and goes to the Captain, he has challenged the authority, power, competence, etc., of the Lieutenant. The Lieutenant will expect the Captain to recognize this challenge and to support his (the Lieutenant's) superior position over the Sergeant. If the Captain does not make his support for the Lieutenant clear to the Sergeant then he may lose some or most of the Lieutenant's support in the future. But the same is true for the Sergeant; if his appeal to the Captain is turned away, then the Sergeant will probably reduce his future support for both the Lieutenant and the Captain.

Still, there remains no real alternative for the Captain. Unless one or both is to be fired or transferred, he must thoroughly explore the causes of the bypass with both the Sergeant and the Lieutenant, together or separately, and mediate in some way between them. Further in most cases, the situation will become known to others in the organization (accurately or inaccurately). For a superior officer, a resolution of the cause(s) of the bypass tactic is important because both the occurrence of the bypass and the responses made to it will undoubtedly affect work performance reverberating all through his command even after the problem has been overtly resolved. The structure of his entire communication system is being strained at all the relevant levels until the matter is finalized, and perhaps on into the future afterward. In short, the basic responsibility for successfully mediating the conflict between the bypasser and the bypassed lies with the superior-receiver. He cannot

abdicate that command responsibility.

Failure to deal with the problems basic to the bypassing event in an organization can have serious effects on the motivation of its members and their willingness to fully commit themselves to the achievement of the goals of the organization. In small military organizations this is especially true because personnel must be trained to follow the directions of their superiors quickly and effectively. Unresolved bypassing incidents also pose a threat to the authority of the superior (the commanding officer receiving the bypass) because subordinates in the work team, peers in other work teams, and superiors up the vertical control ladder, may all come to view him as unable to handle his command or the people in it. The threat to the higher authority is most severe if the bypassing tactic is frequently repeated by subordinates while the basic problems go unresolved and the situation becomes widely known. While a bypassing incident can clearly have a serious impact on the status or reputation of the superior as receiver, the greater damage will be to the communication system, dependent upon what action is taken and how quickly. In the military this is particularly true because the organization and its proper function is much more important than any one individual (e.g., MacArthur-Truman). The specific responses made by the superior to mediate and resolve the basic conflict vary in any particular case, and will depend on both the causes of the conflict and on how the causes are perceived by the bypasser and the bypassed. We turn now to examine the options of the other two players in the scene.

Impact on the Bypassee

It may initially be thought that the most important effect of bypassing involves the reaction of the bypassee to such a tactic. Most of the writers on the subject have argued that bypassing raises questions of loyalty, confidence, ability, trust and candor in the mind of the bypassee regarding his role relationship to both the bypasser and the superior-receiver; that view is probably valid as far as it goes. Remembering that the bypassee is usually unaware of the bypassing, what often seems to happen is that the Captain informs the Lieutenant of the Sergeant's bypassing act, questions are raised about lack of loyalty and support between all three, and then the Captain tells the Lieutenant to look into the substance of the matter and take care of it (i.e., the Captain orders the Lieutenant to call in the Sergeant, settle the matter and report the settlement to him). In a military organization, and presumably in many civilian organizations, the superior recognizes the bypass as a serious matter which threatens control at several levels. In order to reduce the threat to future control the superior may feel that he must put the responsibility for correcting it back in the hands of the bypassee ("How One Company Gives Its Employees a Say," 1979, p. 49). In some ways this is tantamount to telling the bypassee that he should have handled it better in the first place, and this action may simply worsen the whole situation.

A commanding officer may feel that he must send clear signals telling the whole organization that bypassing is not an acceptable way to resolve superior-subordinate conflict. By openly passing the whole matter back to the bypassee, the superior is telling all his subordinates

that they cannot avoid dealing with the chain of command or with the established vertical lines of the organization. The superior's action thus reinforces the concept of the chain of command and demonstrates the determination of the superior that his subordinates at all levels must effectively use the formal structure of the organization to solve their problems. But it must be clearly noted that when a superior adopts this tactic he may have abdicated or reduced his ability to serve as mediator, and he may have made any mutually acceptable resolution of the conflict impossible.

In any event the bypassed in the middle must now solve two problems: first, what to do about the bypasser and the problem raised by the bypassing act, and second, how to reconstruct both his upward and downward role relationships after having been bypassed. Uris (1970) proposes that a person who has been bypassed must usually ask himself the following rather obvious questions (pp. 32-33): (1) Why was I bypassed (as perceived by my subordinate)? (2) Is the reason for the bypassing tactic because I am not performing my job in the proper manner (as perceived by my superior)? (3) What must be done to prevent future bypassing, to reconstruct my role relationships in both directions? These three questions do not, nor are they intended to provide the bypassed with tactics to employ in the situation. Rather, they are intended to guide him in a review of his role relationships. The initial impact of bypassing on the bypassed, most writers have argued, is one of self-examination, a review of the perceptions of his role (as perceived by his subordinates, his superiors and himself [self-image]).

As Dyer and Dyer (1965) point out, the fact that bypassing took place may not relate directly to the management style of the bypassed, but may relate more to some fault in the operation of the organization's vertical control system (p. 77). Uris points out that a supervisor should ask himself the following questions related to his communication with subordinates and superiors when he finds that he has been bypassed by a subordinate (pp. 32-33). The references following each question refer to relevant concepts in communication theory.

- (1) Are you too slow in responding to employees requests? A failure to respond may prompt a belief that a superior doesn't care about his problems. The superior must keep the subordinate informed of how and when the matter will be handled. If communication from the superior's level upward is the problem then some way must be found to improve or speed up your upward communication, especially decision making [Linking-pin, Likert].
- (2) Are you as the superior using the "back of your hand?" This asks if the proper attention or importance is being given to subordinates and their problems. A supervisor must show that he is concerned with subordinate's questions. The superior must not let routine management receive the attention which his subordinates deserve more [Supportive relationships, Gibb].
- (3) Are you as the superior a good listener? When a subordinate brings a problem to you, do you really hear what his problem is, or do you just listen to the words? Unless you can realize and understand the true problem, the subordinate may bypass you until someone helps him [Empathic interaction, Berlo].
- (4) Do you have the influence needed and use it with your boss? If a subordinate perceived that you can't help him, even though you should be the person to do so, he will probably seek out the level which can help him [Interaction-influence, Likert].

The impact of these guidelines seems clear: All of them question the nature of the bypassed's personal relationship with his subordinates, how his subordinates have come to perceive him.

Bird (1973) reporting on a study conducted of a bypassing program used by the U.S. Air Force (Europe), says that "the vast majority [of mid/low level supervisors] expressed resentment towards the [open-line (bypassing)] program because it allowed subordinates to go over their heads" (p. 327). One of the principal complaints, according to Bird, was poor program administration, because it seemed to many respondents that they "were made to look bad in the eyes of the operatives [subordinates] by the fact that advertisements . . . made it appear that the program was initiated without the approval of lower level managers" (p. 328).

Most of the available material on the impact of bypassing has "re-treated" from analysis of the act itself, and given little more than general advice on traditional supervision. The unstated assumptions seem to be that either (1) the bypasser was unjustified in rejecting the normal channel of communication through his immediate superior, and should be forcibly prevented from repeating the bypassing act, or (2) he was justified because of the inadequacy of his superior's supervisory or communication practices and the superior's behavior should be corrected in turn by his superior (the receiver).

These assumptions, of course, are vastly over simplified; they ignore the view that we must deal with what all three members of the vertical pattern perceive to be reality, not what, in fact, the situation might be as seen by some God-like external viewer of the situation. Thus, we are left with the need to apply all the techniques of conflict resolution available in the literature of interpersonal and small group communication theory, especially the theory relating to perceptions of self

and others in value conflict resolution.

In oversimplified summary, the bypasser and the bypassed need to rebuild their role relationship, the perceptions each has of self and others in the situation, with or without the mediation of the superior-receiver. The conflict can be resolved successfully between the three persons if the process is understood and mediation is effective. Otherwise the organization will ultimately lose one or both of them by resignation, transfer, or reassignment of duty, and will probably suffer serious breakdown in productivity in the meantime. Still, interpersonal conflict cannot always be resolved and while the cost of firing and rehiring is high, it may be the only final solution if we are to achieve the goals of the organization. After all is said and done, one still suspects that very little of the bypasser's desired outcome will be realized; revenge, the venting of frustration, and the disruption of established procedures, perhaps; but it does not seem likely that bypassing will normally allow much solid constructive gain.

However, perhaps the most basic difficulty in attempting to rebuild the relationship of bypasser and bypassed is the direct personal threat each now poses for the other. Using our military triad example again, the Lieutenant feels threatened, insecure, betrayed, and angry that the Sergeant would "knife him in the back" without justification, and he also feels that the security of his relationship with the Captain has been jeopardized. The Sergeant feels defensive in having to confront the Lieutenant, after having bypassed him (i.e., refusing to confront him earlier). Thus he feels insecure in his relation to both the Lieutenant and the Captain because he has resorted to unauthorized channels and also,

in effect, challenged the legitimate authority the Lieutenant has over him. He feels threatened by the possibility that one or both of them may later "get back at him" by finding legal modes of revenge. In real life instances, one tends to feel that warm and truly productive relationships between Sergeant and Lieutenant may not ever again be really possible once a really bitter bypass has occurred. We come now full circle to a further examination of the impact of bypassing on the bypasser himself.

Impact on the Bypasser

In general, we have argued that the bypasser's action requires some active response from the superior-receiver, and from the bypassed. After going full circle, the impact on the bypasser is much more likely to be in terms of direct orders from one or both of his superiors or in some cases by reprisal (Caplow, 1976, p. 65). While the bypasser can and should ask the same questions proposed previously for the bypassed individual (bypassed), it would be advantageous if he would ask those questions of himself prior to initiating the bypassing tactic, and then again as both of his supervisors in the chain of command react to his bypassing.

The overall effect of the event, in most cases, would probably be that the bypasser would find his immediate superior in the triad doubtful of his loyalty in the future, and would also probably involve a reduction of his role in participative decision making. It would also be likely that the bypasser would in many cases be more isolated from both his peers and superiors, especially as the issue might affect a whole

network of formal and informal relationships; he has, in a real sense, rejected them and the system (formal and informal) which both his peers and superiors still support. A clear example of this rejection by peers occurred in the Citibank incident with David Edwards as related in Rowan's article.

In a small military unit, such as the company, the effect of bypassing on the bypasser might also depend on his experience, grade (rank) and time-in-service factors, on the degree of general acceptance by members of his organization earlier, and, of course, on the nature and background of the problem which caused the bypassing. Bypassing for personal reasons might be perceived by his peers as not nearly as serious as for operational reasons in his job. In some cases it is perceived as legal and legitimate because the Company Commander (receiver) is recognized as the final action level for personal problems anyway. On the other hand, operational bypassing, which questions decisions that immediate supervisors are required by their role to make, is more likely to be censured by everyone. In the example of the Operations Sergeant in Chapter II, the impact on the bypasser was not only the initial, immediate displeasure of the First Sergeant (bypassed); it was also a long term nature because of the resulting reduction in trust, candor and openness in the functioning of their entire work team.

In summary, the principal impact at all three levels of the triad lies not only in the immediate emotional responses expressed in a bypassing situation, but also in the strained and changed communication processes and relationships, and in the effect of those changes on the communication structure, situations and functions of the organization.

attempts to attain its goals. We turn now to explore the typical effects of bypassing on the overall communication system.

The Impact of Bypassing on the Organization
Communication System

The impact of bypassing on an organization (whether it be a company size military unit, actually a subsystem, or any larger type military or civilian organization) is determined, to a large extent, by the impact the bypassing tactic has on the effectiveness of its organization communication system. Does the system (or subsystem) continue to achieve its goals--personal, team, division and total goals at acceptable levels? When the bypassing occurs at various levels of a large organization, according to Szilagyi (1981), "the problem . . . [encountered in communication] are multiplied many-fold in the organization communication network" (p. 389). In essence the impact expands outward geometrically to have recognizable effects beyond the immediate triadic interrelationships; the impact can sometimes move serially all through a system.

Sometimes when bypassing takes place in the organization, the normal structure of communication is altered, the normal functions are changed if not disrupted, and the climate of the whole system seems to "go sour," and the level of productivity is nearly always lowered. Szilagyi (1981) observed that confusion within the structure of the communication system will make communication more difficult (p. 389). It upsets the normal communication relationships between individuals, teams, and divisions, which are required for the effective communication system (Bales, 1952, p. 7).

As noted in Chapter II, bypassing can seriously interrupt the full and timely flow of information, short-circuit the process of making required decisions, weaken the ability to control work through supervision, and make adaptation to change less firm and timely. Each of these functions is dependent on the condition that a set of minimally acceptable role relationships can be agreed upon. Bypassing introduces generally unforeseen complications into the organization process. If people had to anticipate bypassing as a regular part of the system of communication, a predictable system for coordinating their work could not be established or maintained. Therefore, in most organizations, management's goal is to reduce the likelihood of bypassing by developing a positive communication climate of relationships.

The impact of bypassing on the organization can be summed up, as we have repeatedly noted, in terms of the impact it has on the process of achieving the goals of that organization. In general, any organization communication system is the end result of combining the structure, situations, and functions of communication in such a way as to coordinate people in their effort to meet organizational objectives or goals. So the key question which the study of organizational communication must answer is to describe the conditions in which an organization communication system, most of the time and in most organizations, will be maximally productive (achieve an optimum balance among its varied personal and organizational goals).

There is, of course, no final agreement in the current literature in the limited area of organization communication as to what set of characteristics will be demonstrated by the most effective communication system

in any organization. But it has become possible to identify a set of "communication process goals" which appear under a wide variety of different labels, in most of the recognized works in organization theory, management theory and communication theory. The following is an effort to distill a group of central concepts from all these materials, on which there is general agreement as criteria for identifying the most effective organizational communication systems. It cannot be argued that these qualities, when present, will guarantee the success of the organization where they exist, but it can be argued that very few organizations operate effectively without them. The following list of five groupings, although somewhat overlapping, includes key ideas on which there seems to be much agreement among such writers as Herzberg, McDougall, Likert, Argyris, Blake and Mouton, Katz and Kahn, Barnard, Berlo, Keith Davis, Goldhaber, Haney, Redding, Thayer, Boulding, Maslow and others. In each grouping an attempt will be made to define the key characteristic and then to indicate the impact which bypassing might have on it in most cases in most organizations. In this way we attempt to assess the effects of bypassing on an organization communication system, taken as a whole.

Supportive Relationships

A common goal for communication systems is to attain a social environment or organization climate in which the communication practices of the organization will be supportive and not punitive. Supportive communication practices, especially in vertical relationships, can be said to exist where the communication climate in which superior and subordi-

nate communication is open, candid, and free. Such supportive action is characterized by mutual (subordinate and superior) attitudes of trust and respect, and by a desire to secure agreement through cooperative interaction rather than by the threat of position power.

The use of the bypassing tactic will have a tendency to create insecurity in the minds of all employees concerning their relationship to each other and to the bypasser. The free and easy climate of trust may be stored away while everyone waits to see what will happen, and it may not ever reappear. Bypassing tactics may even force the bypassed and receiver-superior to take action based on position power in order to correct the situation raised by the bypasser or to insure that the bypasser does not repeat the tactic. Such action would tend to create a punitive relationship, and make it hard to rebuild the older condition. The bypassing tactic has questioned the trust, candor and respect relationship and has rejected the belief that cooperative agreements can be reached in their existing role relationships. But, bypassing may have a positive impact by telling the superior that something is wrong in the vertical communication system in the organization. A superior who is confronted with a number of bypassing incidents should view the bypassing as a signal that his subordinates have been unable to generate a set of supportive vertical relationships and that goal achievement has or will suffer because of that lack.

Positive Group Norms

Most of an organization's work is done by teams or groups of people established at various levels in the structure of the organization. It

is hoped that each team, at each level, can create a set of positive norms (versus negative norms). The flow of communication within the group should reinforce the group's existence and provide for the attainment of both the goals of each individual team member as well as the shared or team and organization goals. Where each member can simultaneously satisfy his own and the group goals we can say the team has positive norms. The goals of each work team should be consistent with the goals of the organization. As the organization becomes larger, it should insure that individual goals are not lost sight of in the drive to attain organization goals.

In terms of bypassing, what this means is that positive group norms, or the joining of individual and group goals is not being attained. Thus, the group norm having been established by collective and cooperative action is threatened by the bypass tactic of one or more members. The group may feel that the bypassing member has placed his individual goals above those of the group, that he has rejected their shared goals.

Participative Decision Making

Involvement of all employees in creating the supportive relationships and establishment of positive group norms is necessary to effective functioning of participative decision making. This does not mean that decisions are made by a group instead of by its identified leaders; rather it means that all members of the group at whatever structural level are encouraged to help the group set and adjust their goals, and to participate in decisions where those goals are applied to problems arising in the work of the team. The team leader does not abdicate to the team, but asks for their input in relevant decisions.

The bypassing tactic does not generally take into account the entire group. It is a statement of the goals of one or few members as against those of the group as a whole. The bypassing tactic says to the group and to those in the vertical line above, that the individual does not wish to use the group method of participative decision making, and he asserts his right to challenge a decision as an individual. Bypassing would seem likely to alienate the bypasser from the group's future participative decision making processes just as it causes the loss of supportive relationships and positive group norms. There may, however, be circumstances in which the whole team may itself jointly decide to bypass its immediate superior and it may also be the case that the bypassing tactic can be seen as a warning signal that participative decision making is not working effectively.

Win-Win Interteam Relationships

The win-win condition is the end result of mature goal setting climate in the communication system. At this point the various work teams and divisions of an organization are able to reconcile their differing goals and reach consensus on a balance of how all these goals can best be attained for all members of each group and for the organization as a whole. Such a system avoids the destructive warfare between teams and divisions to gain a preferential position of their own team against all others.

It is unlikely that bypassing tactics will be used by employees who have actually reached the level of a win-win rather than a win-lose condition. Just as in participative decision making, however, a dissatis-

fied individual or a subgroup may reject a team decision or an interteam decision and bypass regular channels to secure a policy reversal. However, bypassing can be viewed as a form of communication feedback which would cause the re-evaluation of policy by superiors, or the rebalancing of the work organization goals. Again, bypassing may indicate that system re-evaluation is needed, and a new goal balance be established.

Change and Learning Readiness

At this communication level the goal is to use the whole organization communication system as a means to adapt that system to changes in the external environment. By definition, an open system is constantly adjusting to change; inputs from outside, internal processing and new forms of output are the main functions of a system. As in the foregoing areas, bypassing tactics might help to keep the organization informed of the most recent trends and of the need to change, but it might also be a signal that some part of the internal-external communication system is not functioning properly.

In summary, it would seem that bypassing would be a signal to peers and superiors that the bypasser perceives something wrong with the manner in which organization goals are being established and implemented. When these communication process goals are largely realized in the operation of an organization communication system, then there seems a good chance to realize the substantive goals of both individual members and of the total organization. But when bypassing occurs it is not difficult to see that it can change all these relationships and weaken the effectiveness of all the communication processes involved in goal achievement.

While the effect of bypassing on all these factors in the attainment of communication goals cannot be rigorously determined, it would be hard to deny that bypassing will take place and will have some impact on the organization communication system. Increasingly, the importance of bypassing is evidenced by the development of new organization policies to deal with it, such as those noted by Marth (1982, p. 50). These policies take many forms and are as varied as bypassing itself. Many of these policies on bypassing also show the desire of the organization to manage this potentially destructive communication tactic by making it an authorized but controlled alternative to the normal channels of upward communication feedback to management. The next chapter will present and assess the bypassing policies of several organizations as they relate to the structure and function of their communication systems and then to develop some recommendations for management policy on bypassing.

CHAPTER IV

POLICIES AND PROGRAMS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF BYPASSING

The objectives of Chapters II and III were to analyze the nature and causes of the bypassing tactic, and to estimate the impact or effects it can have on the three-level role relationships of the individuals involved, and on the whole immediate system (or subsystem) of communication in which it occurs. The purpose of this chapter will be to examine some communication policies and practices affecting bypassing which are currently used by selected business companies and military organizations, and to make some specific recommendations for the use and control of bypassing by organization managers or military commanders.

One of the main objectives of research in organization communication is, of course, to contribute to methods for improving the effectiveness of the communication processes by which organizations attempt to achieve their goals. The area of communication in which bypassing occurs is vertical communication for organizational control. Although we have further limited this inquiry to those bypassing events which are initiated in an upward direction, the only practical way to discuss upward bypassing is to view it in the context of the flow of communication interaction, continuously spiralling up and down the lines of vertical control in the formal structure of the organization. In very broad terms, this vertical interaction carries plans downward, returns feedback on their imple-

mentation upward, and adapts to continuous change by sending repeated messages back down and back up again in a continuing spiral of adjustment or control. We have treated bypassing as a tactic in which a subordinate circumvents these established channels for vertical interaction, sending upward messages around intermediate superiors thus eliminating them from the normal flow of information and decision making.

This chapter will examine some policies which selected organizations have developed in an effort to establish and maintain effective organizational control through vertical communication, and especially to investigate how these policies attempt to manage upward bypassing. Since we have alluded earlier to situations in which bypassing seems justified, and in some cases even becomes a valuable process, we must now also develop a position for estimating when bypassing is constructive and when destructive. We can then present some recommendations on its use and control by business managers and military commanders.

The U.S. Army in its manual on Leadership at Senior Levels of Command, DA PAM 600-15 (1968) says that effective upward communication cannot be achieved merely by an attitude of open-minded receptivity on the part of the senior commander (p. 59). Truly effective upward vertical communication must be developed; it will not automatically occur once the channels are created on paper, and its effectiveness finally depends on the total climate for communication in the organization.

As long as vertical communication processes are less than fully effective, bypassing will continue to be used in most organizations until a more receptive and responsive communication climate is developed. Recognizing this condition, many organizations have been searching for ways

to establish more effective vertical communication to deal with bypassing as it occurs, and to regulate or control its use and the responses made to it within the organization. Some organizations have positively sanctioned bypassing and tried to constructively direct it toward mutually beneficial results both for the organization and for the three or more levels of persons concerned. Such deliberate approval and development of bypassing has been fraught with obvious difficulties since organization members are still human, react to frustration as subordinates, and find it difficult to maintain a trusting climate sufficient to make bypassing unnecessary.

Hanley (1969) notes that a continuing and serious problem facing management people in every industry is "the ability of management to discover hidden employee complaints, misunderstandings, and uncertainty and to keep them from developing into major grievances that could undermine an otherwise effective employee relation program" (p. 40). One method sometimes used to assure that minor grievances are heard and dealt with early has been the deliberate development of formalized and controlled organization bypassing programs.

Jacobson (1981) notes that "the one sure prevention [for bypassing] is to promote the free flow of information from the bottom ranks to the top" (p. 5). Many managers, and sometimes even top executives, have announced some form of "Open Door Policy," almost as though the manager felt he must encourage the bypassing of his subordinate supervisors if he is to receive feedback on grievances. While this may seem close to insulting his middle managers, the executive seems to take pride in his "openness," at the same time that he makes it clear to his supervisors

that the established system for vertical communication is untrustworthy. However, it may be that our traditional systems of vertical hierarchy should not be expected to carry upward feedback with complete effectiveness. The discussion of these views in the current literature on organization communication seems confusing and inconsistent.

This chapter will examine some examples of how selected organizations have developed active programs for more advantageously coping with the bypassing tactic. Then we will evaluate them, based on the foregoing analysis in this thesis, to identify some of the positive and negative potentials of such programs. The chapter will then attempt to develop a recommended organization policy with respect to upward bypassing and constructive vertical communication for both business and military organizations. Finally we shall present a summary of the study and some suggestions for further research.

Bypassing Programs in Selected Business Companies

The article "How the Xerox Ombudsman Helps Xerox" (1973) describes why and how this modern giant corporation developed and promoted an organization program which legitimizes bypassing. At the Information Technologies Group of Xerox it was felt that such a program would help to develop a better climate for communication. They felt that the typical bypass complaint was direct evidence of malfunctioning superior-subordinate relationships, and that the achievement of both individual and organization goals would be seriously reduced by the bypassing if nothing were done. At Xerox the complaints centered on personnel matters such as transfers, promotions, performance appraisals, wage inequities

and discharges. The immediate superior was frequently bypassed in such matters in order to influence higher line authority to modify or reverse a decision (or to reach some staff person in the personnel area--a "lateral" bypass). A new program was developed in which the Employee Relations Manager became an "Ombudsman" in the structure where employees at any level could go directly with personnel complaints. He was given real power in the organization to the point of being able to overthrow dismissals, but generally he will act only as a mediator in resolving disputes unless management proves unwilling to negotiate openly. In addition, at Xerox, one of the functions of the Ombudsman is to serve as a kind of watchman over company policies to insure that they are enforced fairly and consistently by line managers at all levels.

In the Xerox program, while bypassing would seem to be condoned by the organization, an employee must have attempted to resolve the difficulty directly with his immediate supervisor and on up through normal vertical channels before bringing the problem to the ombudsman. Once the ombudsman receives a complaint he deals with the personnel department, all of the line supervisors involved and with the bypasser-employee. Because of his rather unique position and power in the Xerox organization the ombudsman is in a good position to observe the effects of company policies and to make recommendations to top management on which policies require modification (pp. 188-189).

A program such as the one at Xerox would seem to encourage a full use of the established vertical control system while still providing another outlet for upward communication if that system fails. It should be noted that upward bypassing in the formal system as we described it in

Chapters II and III is not allowed; that is, bypassing a superior without his knowledge and without confronting the man through use of vertical channels. It is still in question as to whether this policy will be capable of reconstructing a favorable communication climate in typical work situations after bringing in the ombudsman or not. It will be difficult to measure the effect of the policy on the entire communication system of Xerox, but the damage done to the normal system would seem far less severe than under typical bypassing. This system seems the best of those tried by business companies and we shall discuss it further under "recommendations."

As noted by Farace, Taylor and Steward (1978) communication access to key individuals in an organization is an important factor in the effectiveness of the organization communication system (p. 277). The special significance of access to top management by low status employees is shown in the article "How One Company Gives Its Employees a Say" (1979, p. 48). The organization described in this article, COBE Laboratories, Inc., has embarked on a program of participatory management which includes access to top management through an established "open door policy."

The COBE open door policy allows any employee to bypass the normal chain of command and go directly to the top management to present positive suggestions or negative criticisms. As with the Xerox example, the organization does put some limits on this access. The employees may go directly to the persons at any superior level they wish with suggestions and criticisms and the person at that level in COBE must receive them and listen. However, the suggestion will eventually be managed by taking the matter back to the individual's immediate supervisor.

In our terminology, the whole chain of vertical control must confront any such problem. This policy on bypassing is, however, an escape valve only for a total program of communication operating through normal channels; it is intended for use in exceptional cases only. And there still remains a real possibility that reprisal actions might be taken by immediate supervisors toward their subordinates when they become aware of the upward bypass. There is still the feeling that in a good working climate the bypass should not happen. All of the other effects of bypassing on each member of the triad and on their subsystem (as discussed in Chapters II and III) are still potentials in this program also.

Marth (1982) details the efforts of IBM to create a favorable communication climate in the organization (pp. 50-51). The beginnings of IBM's established bypassing program can be traced to the organization's founder, Thomas Watson, Sr., who, in 1914, established an "open door policy" for all employees with a complaint. The policy was that the office door of every supervisor, including his own, must be open to any employee. Over the years it has become clear that the Chief Executive Officer has not been the receiver of most complaints through the "open door policy." Instead, most of them are directed to lower level managers, thus encouraging more effective use of the established system at that level.

While a policy of bypassing levels of hierarchy may in some respects be detrimental to the established organization communication system, it does convey top management's concern about employee goal achievement down to the lower levels of the organization. It may be that trust in management is a key factor in organization communication systems and that

through the use of the open door policy, management can somehow develop increased trust. At any rate most organizations maintain an informal attitude of "open door" access even though few have developed a full formal system like these discussed above.

Readiness to adapt to change based on both internal and external pressures seems necessary to developing a positive communication climate and thereby a communication system. If the "open door" policy is to have credibility, it must produce evidence in the form of real change when needed.

One of the significant goals of most communication systems as we noted in Chapter III is to establish a supportive climate in which to work, a supportive relationship between superior and subordinate at all levels (as opposed to a punitive climate). Still, in the examples cited above the principle emphasis in their policies on bypassing seems to have been more toward participative decision-making or ability to adapt to changing conditions than toward supportive relationships. At New England Telephone, Harriman (1974) indicates that the thrust of the company's "Private Lines" program is to insure that employees can talk and bosses will listen (p. 144). Such a program would seem at least a first step toward attaining an atmosphere of trust, openness and candor between superiors and subordinates.

As this paper is intended to examine bypassing in the military as well as the business organizations, and since their programs are quite different, we must now consider the Army's program on bypassing.

Bypassing Programs in the U.S. Army

The U.S. Army, like the business companies described above, has developed programs for the circumvention of the normal vertical lines of communication, or "chain of command." In the Army, the programs are sometimes formalized by legal regulation, and they are supported by years of tradition. Still, like their counterparts in the civilian section, they are not called bypassing programs or policies; other names are given to them which disguise the fact that they can be used to bypass the formal structured lines of authority and communication.

Weinstein (1979) notes that one of the problems with the Army's program for dealing with the grievances of subordinates is credibility. Often the complaint is not perceived as a serious one by those administering the program. In addition, in the Army the types of complaints which are taken seriously and the recommendations made by the program administrators (such recommendations are generally viewed as orders) vary according to the individual command climate in each separate organization (p. 74).

In the Army the bypassing program which has the most direct application to the concerns of this study is again the informal one called the "Open Door Policy." While there is no formalized requirement for establishing an open door policy, Hays and Thomas (1967) note that "most commanders traditionally announce an 'open door policy' to stimulate upward communication" (p. 37). This policy allows all soldiers of a command access directly to their immediate commanding officer and through him to all higher level commanding officers in the vertical chain of command. An example of this would be that a soldier can take a problem

directly to his company commander or he can even bypass that level and go to the battalion, brigade, division/installation and higher commander if he desires (and if he has the courage).

It is argued that the open door policy is intended to be a method whereby commanders can learn more about the effectiveness of downward communication within the organization, but it remains clear that most soldiers are aware that the person they go up to in the open door policy is primarily committed to the established chain of command. Hays and Thomas (1967) note that this may often times make the soldier hesitate to use the open door because he cannot shake off the idea that the person he is going to see is still the "Old Man," the commander of his immediate unit (p. 87), and not an outside "ombudsman." In this respect a soldier may find it easier to bypass his immediate commander and go to a higher commander, who does not generally have the same "mystique" surrounding his position; the higher authority is removed from command over his every day life. In the military organization, while the company commander remains directly in the vertical chain of command and communication for operational tasks, it is also part of his job to serve as a concerned person to whom the troops can bring their personal problems without fear. Thus, as noted by Farace, Taylor and Steward (1978) he should remain accessible to lower level personnel both by means of an authorized bypass program and by going up through the normal chain of command (p. 277).

However, the soldier may also seek out the Inspector General's office (I.G.) when he wishes to name a grievance or have a problem explored outside of the chain of command. The Inspector General's office

has been a formal part of the Army's structure since 1813 and is formally independent of any other chain of command. The Inspector General's complaint procedure, according to Evan (1965), would "seem to involve an organization anomaly [to normal military procedures] in granting all Army personnel a legal right to lodge complaints directly with the I.G. officer, for it thus sanctions the circumventing of the chain of command." He also notes that the chain of command is not in practice circumvented very frequently because the I.G. officer, being temporarily detailed from his line position to duty with the I.G. office is committed to the established vertical communication system in the military organization, and likely to be unsympathetic to bypassers with complaints about the communication and control system of the units. At any rate, the ordinary soldier does not frequently make use of the I.G. system to air complaints about the chain of command.

Besides the open door policy and the Inspector General process, officers/soldiers may also bypass the normal vertical communication chain with problems or complaints by using other unofficial channels available through the Chaplain's office, and sometimes through locally administered suggestion systems. Throughout the Army, however, it is made clear that any problems should be addressed to an immediate commander and that no matter where they are directed, it is through that office that action or resolution of the situation will ultimately flow. Nearly all personnel know that military discipline and chain of command procedures are paramount. So typical upward bypassing still goes on, especially in company level units, rather than to make use of these alternative programs.

The programs which have been described in the above examples are not an exhaustive listing of all the types of programs in use by industry or by the Army either. However, they are broadly representative of the type of program currently in use and they provide a reference point from which to discuss the positive and negative aspects of such programs, and later to develop recommended policies.

An Evaluation of Current Programs and Policies on Bypassing

Positive Aspects of Bypassing Programs

When clearly defined, upward bypassing seems obviously damaging to the effective operation of any formal vertical control system. It elicits visions of evil lurking in the shadows of organization corridors. While there are obvious negative aspects of bypassing, and even of corporate programs which encourage it, there are also, surprisingly, several quite appealing potentialities. As noted in the foregoing section, both business and military organizations have found a need to provide subordinates with some form of "appeal" from the decisions of their superiors. The programs in the examples cited have as a common element the flow of ideas and of feedback on plans up the lines of vertical communication to a point at which they are blocked. Then the programs provide for the communication to move out and upward through some parallel channel and come back into the system at a level where the idea can receive another hearing. This is true whether the program has a formal administrator or is just an informal policy where the employee himself must select the route and the individuals to contact.

It seems clear that no manager or organization would go to the trouble to establish or even allow the establishment of an authorized upward bypass program unless it was felt that some units of management needed to receive some kinds of upward communication which the established vertical communication system could not or would not produce and send upward through channels to them. More fully, the main reasons for an authorized bypassing program would be (1) the failure of the established upward communication system to produce the feedback needed at higher levels of the organization for appropriate supervisory action, or (2) actual blockage or the belief that unjustified blockage had occurred in upward communication by an immediate superior, and was thus producing a severe and chronic employee morale problem.

It is hard to believe that bypassing would occur or be authorized unless the formal upward channels of communication had in some important way failed to achieve their purpose. If this is so, then we would expect management attempting to find ways to repair or rebuild that vertical system instead of accepting its inadequacy and authorizing process to circumvent it. Still, companies with such respected communication systems as Xerox and IBM have deliberately established such bypass programs. We must assume, therefore, that they do not believe it fully possible to establish vertical systems which are sufficiently effective, and must therefore tolerate bypassing to some degree. Thus, such organizations must believe that a controlled set of bypass options is better than an uncontrolled and unpredictable pattern of bypassing revolt.

Harriman (1974) says that the "Private Lines" program at New England Telephone has had a positive effect because they took the time to develop

a well designed program which would "help subordinates tell management ways to improve their own [the employees] jobs--as well as the company's overall effectiveness (p. 143). He also notes that one of the very positive aspects of the program at New England Telephone is that the matters brought to the attention of management by use of the program have practically all been "serious, thoughtful, and concerned with the welfare of the total company" (p. 148). Clearly New England Telephone must have given up trying to get all these suggestions up through the established channels, and has established the bypass channel for this reason. It is difficult to understand why these "serious, thoughtful" suggestions could not be elicited in the normal system. Many companies are now trying to achieve the same goals by adapting the Japanese program called "Quality Circles," but it must be noted that such programs do not involve bypassing the established lines of vertical control.

Ouchi (1981) states "probably the best known feature of Japanese organizations is their participative approach to decision-making" (p. 43). He further notes "when an important decision needs to be made in a Japanese organization, everyone who will feel its impact is involved in making it" (p. 44). He states that "formal reporting relationships are ambiguous in a Type Z [organization], making varied responses possible" (p. 107), but in alluding to bypassing, he also states "however, supervision must be backed by the company in connection with the decision made. Otherwise supervision would lose its standard and the employees would be running to every Tom, Dick and Harry for a reversal of the decision made by the immediate supervisor on the job" (p. 259).

At Xerox the ombudsman program has had the effect of making the entire management team more aware of the importance of personal contact with employees, not just reliance on standard forms to make personnel decisions. The problem with relying on paperwork and forms to make judgments on people is that a lower manager may not be a good "people handler," but may be able to fill out paperwork and let the trained people in personnel do his job. By the time the paper work gets up to higher levels of management or to a personnel department "nobody can tell what's wrong." In "How the Xerox Ombudsman Helps Xerox," the point is made that "someone who deals with the personnel system as an outsider is in a good position to come up with ways to improve it" (p. 188). Still the point is not the same as going around a superior to his boss. The Xerox system maintains the responsibility of the basic triad or chain; it does not try to develop a substitute for that basic decision making system, but inserts a mediator to avoid the tensions of the usual bypass.

An important point about the positive aspects of having and using a program/policy concerning bypassing is that it may help supervisors to take more of an interest in their subordinates because both parties are aware of the possibility of the bypass. The Xerox program has led some managers themselves to seek help from the ombudsman in resolving problems; some managers have even referred unhappy subordinates to the ombudsman, "in effect seeking impartial adjudication of an issue before anyone has gotten around to submitting a complaint" (p. 189).

Hays and Thomas (1967) say that upward communication "serves as a valuable indicator of the effectiveness of a leader's communication. By this feedback he has some idea of how imperfectly his message was received"

(p. 86). The use of bypassing could produce positive results if the leader upon receiving the information through bypassing views it as an inescapable and necessary addition to the feedback provided by the authorized vertical communication system. Still it must be realized that the bypass is evidence that the vertical system of the unit has to some degree failed to function as it should.

The fact is that subordinates are generally reluctant to report the bad aspects of a situation up the chain of command. The commander, according to Hays and Thomas, must be aware that upward feedback is always to some degree filtered, even when it comes in the form of an unauthorized bypass action (p. 87). As Harriman (1974) notes, the New England Telephone policy of bypassing may result in an "accurate, timely and unfiltered flow of communication from within the company that would help it [leadership] perceive and react to change in an effective manner" (p. 143). This would also be true for the military unit.

Several articles on bypassing and related topics, including those written by Weinstein (1970), and Hays and Thomas (1967), have noted that a bypass as a form of upward vertical communication may "serve as an opportunity for the release of pent-up emotional tensions and pressures" (p. 86). Weinstein also says that "as such they [the bypassing acts] are rather functional in maintaining the status quo and, thus it is understandable that bureaucracies have created them" (p. 74).

Hamley (1969), in writing about the St. Paul Companies "open line" program, says that "it fulfills another communication goal at the St. Paul Companies by helping management keep its finger on the pulse of employee concerns" (p. 40). Again the positive aspects of the bypass

action is that employees, through this activity or tactic, are able to give management one more opportunity to really understand them. Management may come to see that a problem for one worker may become a problem for many. The bypass tactic makes it possible for the one to speak, when the many are not willing or able to do so. In this same perspective, Barrea (1981) says that the employees use of the bypass tactic (can help [management] to discover how the rigid, rubber stamp policies enable everyone to escape the blame for unpopular decisions" (p. 130).

Some of the positive aspects of the bypassing program/policies mentioned above would certainly seem to be valid. As selected instances they come from programs in companies with otherwise well respected organizational communication systems. In summary, it is probably the case that no vertical communication system can be run well enough to avoid all need for bypassing outlets. Thus management should continuously improve the established chain of upward feedback as much as possible and then authorize an emergency bypass system which does as little damage to the formal system as possible. Some aspects of the Xerox Ombudsman program are probably the most appealing of those studied, and will become part of later recommendations.

Negative Aspects of Bypassing Programs

Throughout the first three chapters of this study we have made the assumption that, by definition, upward bypassing is potentially damaging to the functions of vertical communication in any organization. Presumably the lines of vertical communication are established and used as the best means of maintaining control over the complex process of producing some goods or services through the coordinated effort of large

numbers of persons in an organization. Therefore any attempt to bypass these communication lines in order to make decisions or control processes by unauthorized means, unless justified as an exceptional situation, would undercut the effectiveness of all the communication functions performed by that system. Thus, nearly all of the parts of Chapters II and III can be viewed as demonstrating negative effects of bypassing. However, in the following pages some additional negative aspects are introduced, the others summarized and all are applied to the authorized bypass programs described above.

Moore (1971) cites four main negative aspects of the bypassing tactic (pp. 10-11), to which is added a brief critique of each point in the following:

- (1) The bypassing act undercuts the authority of the bypassed supervisor, who is likely to become resentful, if not enraged, by such activity. (This result may be more damaging to the organization than the morale and productivity loss when the bypasser's effort is refused.)
- (2) Bypassing activity may disrupt work of greater significance which had been scheduled, but which must now be delayed while the bypassing incident is resolved. (This, of course, is a secondary effect on productivity; normally made decisions are made insecure and possibly incapable of implementation when challenged by an unauthorized bypass. The whole operational structure may in some cases be stopped completely.)
- (3) Seeing one person successfully conduct a bypass may encourage peers or others to do the same thing. (In an epidemic

of bypassing, the entire organization structure is, in part, made inoperable. The organization system becomes anarchy and chaos, while the normal system stands unused around it.)

- (4) Being a disrupter of normal communication flow, bypassing can lead to a breakdown or confusion in other forms of upward as well as downward, lateral, and external communication. (Lateral and external communication can be made uncertain by vertical bypassing and the whole communication system can begin to function less effectively.)

Murray (1976) adds that the "military's open door" policy, because it allows "anyone to walk into the commander's office at a certain time, and talk about his or her problems," is a waste of time, destructive to the military system, and causes more problems than it resolves. Specifically he says that the "open door" policy for the management of an enlisted man's personal problems is:

- (1) Ruinous to the chain of command; it subverts authority and delays action. "The corporal's authority over the private, the sergeant's over the corporal and the lieutenant's over the sergeant is eroded" (p. 753).
- (2) Unfair to the commander because the problems presented through the "open door" are often "intimate problems [unloaded on him] which more often than not . . . are resolved in other ways due to time."*

*With respect to personal problems, Murray adds that "what remains is something awful; your knowledge [of the situation] . . . which undermines morale, because he or she resents your knowledge forever after." This resentment, according to Murray, serves "admirably to ruin whatever rapport you might have previously had" (p. 753).

Weinstein (1979) states that "internally created groups such as the Inspector General's office . . . are only as effective as their top echelon allows them to be" (p. 272); that is, the top level of the chain of command of the organization must insure that the decisions of the Inspector General are truly independent and are fully implemented. If the lower levels of management (or the employees) perceive that the policy is a sham or if they do not support it (as shown by Bird [1973] in his study of the U.S. Air Force program in Europe) then it will probably be viewed in such a negative manner that it cannot be effectively used.

A communication climate characterized by trust and loyalty to the organization and to the people of ones own organization is a very potent factor in making any communication system effective. It may be that any bypassing will be perceived as disloyalty, no matter how well it may otherwise be justified. Evan (1965) points out that while a "soldier has the right to lodge a complaint with the I.G. [or use the "open door"], line officers may be inclined to view such action by subordinates as virtually disloyal conduct" (p. 149). This means disloyal conduct toward ones own organization and to the immediate superior who was bypassed. It was the responsibility of the superior to attend to the needs of the organization and the people below him in it. The bypasser has rejected his right to do so and challenged his competence to do it.

All this can be perceived as rejection of one's whole organization, a withdrawal of all team loyalty. As Weinstein has said, it is understandable that organizations would establish programs (authorized bypassing) because in many respects such programs foster another whole kind of upward communication, which if properly used by management, can provide

an added channel for information not otherwise available. But since some bypassing will occur, authorized or not, the issue remains to determine a policy toward bypassing which would be at once least destructive and most productive for the total organization in all conditions.

Recommendations for an Organization
Policy on Bypassing

At the outset it must be said that an organization should have a program/policy to deal with bypassing since it will occur, with varying frequency, in most organizations. The failure to develop such a program/policy would be to lose the advantages which might be accrued from its constructive use, and would risk the disadvantages of an uncontrolled disruption of the communication system. Clearly it is not possible to describe the best design for all organizations and for all situations. A program should fit each organization's particular goals and needs. It should be fully understood and used by all levels of the organization, and vigorously supported and reviewed on a regular basis at top management levels. As with all organization programs/policies, the one dealing with bypassing must be flexible and adaptable to changing situations and to changes in personnel. (It should even be used to change itself!)

We shall divide our discussion of recommendations into two parts:

(1) for all organizations and (2) for lower level (company size) military organizations. Most of what is discussed in the first section (non-military) will apply to all organizations and will apply to military units as well, but the second section will add materials useful only at company level military units.

A Bypass Policy for non-Military
Organizations

The establishment of a bypassing program can help both the upward and downward flow of communication if it is (1) not destructive of the basic upward feedback system through regular channels, and (2) truly needed to assure fair treatment, more complete feedback, and necessary system change. Vigilance must be constant to insure that the normal flow of communication in both upward and downward messages in the established system will remain as timely and positive as possible. If the bypassing of the established system becomes too frequent, it is clear evidence of the need for revising the basic system, not trying to operate both the old system and the bypass program at the same time. It seems likely that frequent bypassing because of insistence on the use of the old system at the same time would normally create intolerable stresses on superior-subordinate relationships.

The bypassing program can serve as a safety valve for informing management of needed improvements or changes in the system, and by providing upward feedback which would not otherwise be available and it can increase the effectiveness of the subsequent downward communication. Such a program can provide a release valve for employees to vent feelings, without having to involve them directly with their peers or superiors in their immediate work group.

An authorized bypassing program need not work against a manager's effort to establish a positive communication climate in the organization if it is properly designed and used. The manager should be viewed as being supportive of his subordinates at all subordinate levels; he has

delegated authority down the line to them and he must not allow his acceptance of bypassing to threaten that authority or to imply that he distrusts the competence of his subordinates. The bypass system, therefore should remain largely unused, and the regular system should involve all relevant personnel in appropriate decision making. The manager must insure that the lower level decision makers have the information needed to participate in a decision, and must create positive work team and inter-team relationships. The bypass system should only be necessary to assure that highly exceptional circumstances could quickly come to the attention of the manager, and that lower level subordinates should feel that they do have access to the manager if needed.

An authorized bypassing program in the ideal situation would also help the organization to adapt its communication and production system to changes. Bypassing programs would encourage employees at all levels to think about their work, and how it could be better performed. They would be encouraged to use the normal channels, but having the bypassing program available to employees would encourage supervisors to give more serious thought or consideration to subordinate suggestions; an incompetent or obstructive supervisor might find himself being asked by senior managers to explain the reasons why a worthwhile suggestion did not come up through channels.

While the above considerations seem to support the establishment of a bypassing program for most organizations, it should be designed within certain limitations. In general, the foregoing analysis in this study suggests that the Xerox Ombudsman program provides, in broad outline, the most useful model for such a program in most organizations, but with the

following conditions:

- (1) The program/policy should be authorized, structured and communicated throughout the communication system of the organization, not left unclear, uncommunicated or unsanctioned.
- (2) Since upward bypassing is a vertical communication action, the program should be perceived as part of the control and decision-making system of the organization.
- (3) Upward bypassing policy should require that an attempt to deal with the suggestion, the grievance or the problem must be made in the direct vertical line of supervision and cannot proceed into the bypass channel without meeting this requirement. Such a limitation insures the primary use of the established vertical communication process, but retains the right to bypass it.
- (4) Provisions should then be made to bypass the subordinate manager, and take the problem to an "arbiter," the administrator of the bypassing program (like the Ombudsman at Xerox) who would mediate the conflict at all necessary levels.
- (5) Supervisors should be encouraged to consult with the Ombudsman to avoid bypassing by their subordinates where possible before it occurs.

The program/policy on bypassing should use the established chain of command to as great an extent as possible. For example, a worker may take a problem to his supervisor, and the supervisor may then be forced to use a bypass tactic to go around his superior. (It should not be the responsibility of the worker who initiated the upward communication to

bypass unless the blockage occurred with his immediate supervisor.) In this way the supervisor demonstrates leadership and fosters a positive communication climate in the organization. In the other direction, bypassing should go up the chain of command only to the level needed to remove the blockage which prompted the action. In other words, the bypass should not have to proceed from the lowest level in the organization through all intermediate levels to the highest in order for it to be resolved.

The most important aspect to consider in designing a program/policy to deal with bypassing tactics is to make sure that it contributes to the effectiveness of the entire communication system. The issue of greatest significance in these recommendations is that the formal vertical communication system of any organization should be brought to the highest possible level of effectiveness as measured by the criteria (process goals) listed in Chapter III. The bypass program should never become a substitute for a poorly operating vertical system; the bypass program should operate only for very exceptional situations, and then must be operated in such a way as to avoid further erosion in the basic system.

In general, the conclusions presented here seem, on the basis of this study, to represent the best available approach to upward bypassing in most organizations. The emphasis throughout these recommendations has been on finding a way to realize the benefits from establishing an authorized bypassing system without seriously reducing the effectiveness of the vertical control system of that organization.

The "ombudsman" approach seems to provide the best way to balance out those two objectives. When the bypasser goes around his immediate superior, he will not go to a person at a higher level in that same vertical chain, but to an ombudsman who is outside that chain. Hence, the challenges, rejections, threats and strains in the interpersonal and role relationships of the vertical line are much reduced. Similarly, the whole task of mediation necessary to resolve the problem should, in the same way, be made much easier. Thus, this "ombudsman approach" while not a final or absolute solution to the problem, still becomes the central concept in our recommendations on bypassing policy for any organization.

A Bypassing Policy for Company-Sized Military Organizations

However, when applied to military organizations, some further difficulties appear with the "ombudsman approach." As noted in Chapter II, the authorized channel for bypassing the chain of command is the Inspector General system. That structure of "appeal" from actions of the established command line has for many years proved necessary and effective. Still, most military people contacted, and the available literature by military writers, seem to suggest that there are many kinds of situations for which the Inspector General process does not provide a complete or an acceptable answer.

There can be no question that the U.S. Army as an organization has and does depend very strongly on the concept of military discipline; quick and effective response to the orders of a superior is obviously critical to successful combat operations. And in this sense the vertical

chain of command is perceived by all military people as the necessary basis of an organization communication system for the Army. An example of the pervasive nature of this set of concepts is the fact that the military justice system allows for the death penalty for failure to obey a direct order from a superior officer in the face of the enemy. It may be that, regardless of all other similarities to the chain of vertical communication in a business company, the whole intellectual and emotional context of an Army unit is such that there is a strong presumption against any action which questions or overtly threatens the chain of command.

This may be especially true at the level of a company-size military unit since this is the operational level, "down where the action is," and superior-subordinate relationships revolve around face-to-face confrontations and physical action. In this context, like our example of the Sergeant bypassing the Lieutenant to the Captain, and I.G. officer looking at such a case, can be presumed to bring with him a sympathy for the bypassed person which he will find difficult to suppress; some degree of presumption will probably favor the bypassed over the bypasser.

Perhaps the critical issue here is that the I.G. officer is not a professional ombudsman, nor will he remain very long in the I.G. role. He is drawn from a line organization and temporarily detached as an Inspector General. Thus, he will bring with him a background of experience similar to that of the person who was bypassed and will, in all likelihood, identify more clearly with the bypassed than with the bypasser. In some cases, he can be expected to see bypassing as disloyalty as noted in Chapter III.

There is no need for any extended discussion at this point concerning the fairness, objectivity or effectiveness of the Inspector General system. Clearly, it has and does perform a needed service effectively. But the main point is that many military personnel in company-size units will see the I.G. system negatively, and as a result the system cannot be expected to secure for higher levels the kind of upward bypass feedback they most need. When superior-subordinate problems arise in company-size military units, therefore, the lower status person may not use the I.G. system but will undertake an unauthorized bypass directly in his own chain of command with all the damaging results which such an action brings. It is this conclusion which makes necessary some adaptation of our ombudsman approach for application to military organization. It could also be that in that particular company, bypassing within (internal) the unit is better accepted and thereby less damaging than the external bypass to the I.G.

In a company-size or small military unit, therefore, we need to develop a third alternative beyond the two discussed above. When confronted by a problem with his Lieutenant, the Sergeant can request the intervention of the I.G. or he can bypass the Lieutenant and go to the Captain. Our conclusion is that neither of these alternatives will provide a complete or acceptable process in the long run. Therefore, we propose that an ombudsman role be created elsewhere in the organization. For the typical Army company we believe the First Sergeant's role can be expanded and adapted to this task.

Earlier we have used the Sergeant-Lieutenant-Captain illustration even though it is a greatly over simplified view of a bypass situation in

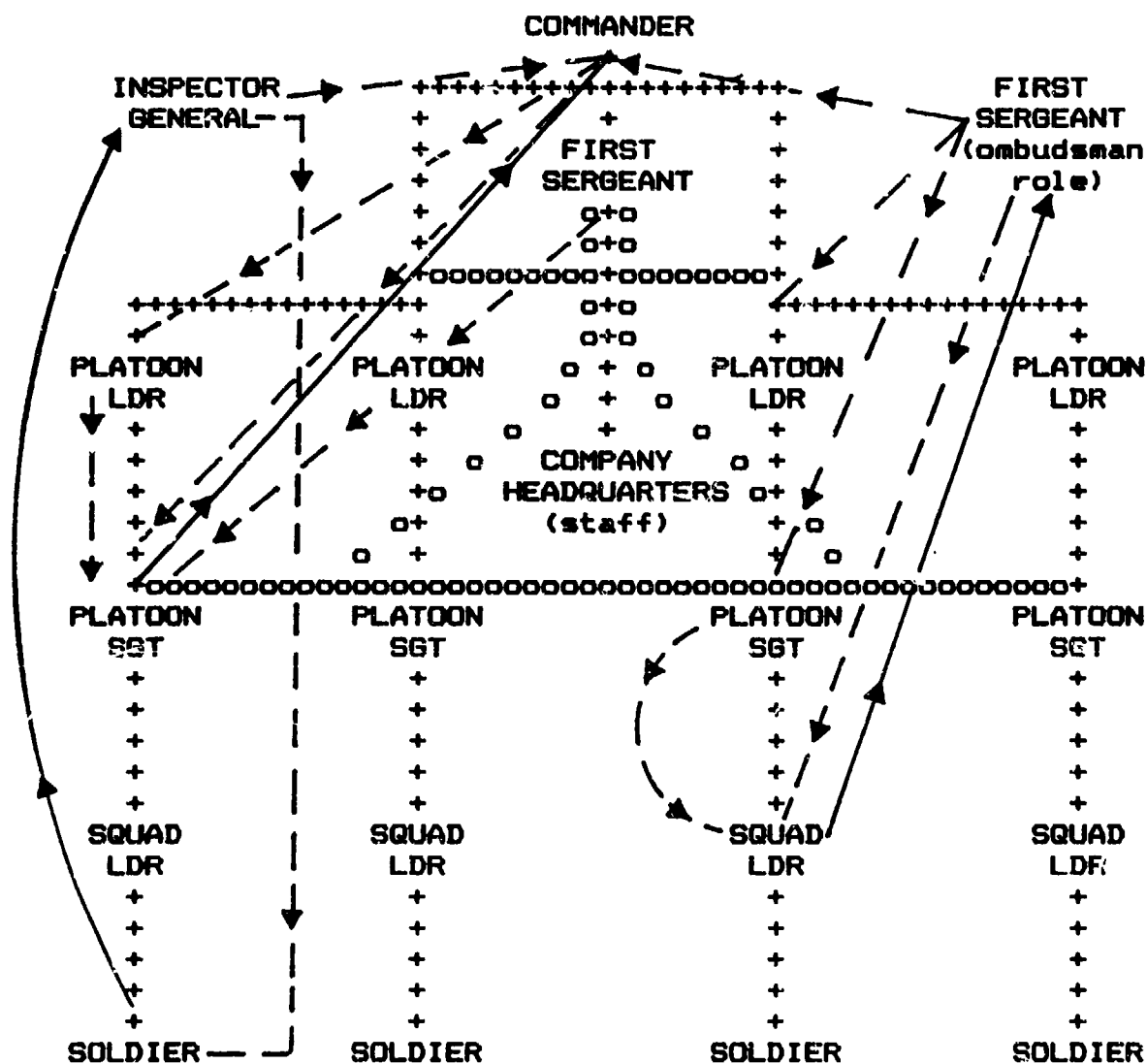
a real infantry company. Consequently, we need now to develop an organization chart of such a military company in more detail, and to modify it to show how the typical upward bypass might occur and how we could avoid bypassing by using the First Sergeant as an ombudsman.

In the following diagram (Figure 4), it will be noted that the chain of command goes from a Captain, as Company Commander, to several Lieutenants, as Platoon Commanders, and that operations are then conducted by Platoon Sergeants and squad leaders; the First Sergeant has no intervening authority in that vertical line of control.

However, as an "administrative supervisor over all the platoons and as a direct assistant with access to the Company Commander, he occupies an ideal position to perform the role of mediator-ombudsman. While the First Sergeant has no formal control over the Lieutenant, it is a foolish and naive officer who will not consult the wisdom and experience of the First Sergeant in dealings with his personnel. All of the recommendations made above concerning that system can be applied to the military company, using the First Sergeant in the ombudsman role. No effort has been made to extend this recommendation to larger military units but it seems likely that a similar structure could be created there as well. The central criteria are simply that the ombudsman be out of the bypasser's direct chain of operational control, and that his position be perceived by all concerned as appropriate to the task of effective mediation of the problem.

Figure 4

THE CHAIN OF COMMAND & LINES OF COMMUNICATION IN A MILITARY UNIT



FORMAL CHAIN OF COMMAND AND COMMUNICATION ++++++

OTHER FORMAL LINE(S) OF COMMUNICATION (not command) oooooo

EXAMPLE OF BYPASSING (line of communication) ———→

FEEDBACK ON BYPASSING BACK TO THE SYSTEM ———→

Example military organization structure does not represent a real military unit.

Summary of Conclusions

This study has attempted to define, describe and analyze the nature of upward bypassing in the process of vertical control, to provide some explanation of how and why it usually occurs, to examine how the bypassing act affects both the individuals directly involved and the functioning of the organization system(s) which surround it. This final chapter has presented a set of selected policies and practices for both civilian and military organizations. These programs are intended to manage the bypassing act so as to reduce its destructive potential to the communication system and, where possible, to make constructive contributions to that system. The recommendations in this chapter are not a panacea, but represent methods or policies which should contribute to a more productive and effective communication system in most organizations.

The assumption indicated at the outset of this study was that the effect of the bypassing act on the individuals involved and on the organization communication system would be largely negative, or destructive. In most of the literature, bypassing is perceived as destructive of an effective chain of command and as damaging to all the persons involved. The study ends by supporting that initial position, but not to the extent initially believed. It would now seem clear that bypassing may have some positive value in an organization communication system and some system balancing-out of its assets and liabilities is needed.

It seems clear that bypassing will continue to be performed, despite the efforts of managers to eliminate the practice, but a workable system can be developed which allows for the bypassing tactic without seriously reducing the effectiveness of the communication system. A number of such

systems were reviewed, with the "ombudsman program" recommended. In some cases, the bypass program even became the vehicle whereby change was initiated. The essence of the recommended program is to find and use a method which maintains a supportive three-level or triadic subordinate-superior inter-relationship for effective achievement of the communication systems process goals, which, if achieved, and other variables are in support of it should result in increased organization productivity.

In the last analysis, bypassing tactics are undeniably "short-circuiting" or circumventing of normal, established channels of communication and will usually damage them; however, an authorized organizational policy on bypassing can be designed to reduce the bad effects of the bypassing action. Such a program can also provide an escape valve for pent-up frustration, and a useful alternative channel for employee feedback in exceptional circumstances. Higher authority in the organization should have an alternative method or route in which upward communication (feedback) can get to them in time to see that a problem exists in the normal communication channels and to take appropriate action to correct it. Bypassing in itself may not be a desirable tactic, but, given the vulnerability of normal upward vertical communication channels to blockage and distortion, bypassing may provide a channel to obtain that extra and necessary upward feedback.

The point remains that bypassing is a tactic to be used only in the exceptional situation and within a process established by the organization for those situations. The principle guiding factor in developing such rules/procedures must be that the bypasser cannot go outside the normal, established channels of upward vertical communication without

having initially discussed the difficulty with his immediate superior. This does not imply the superiors approval is required, but it does mean that bypassing, if it is going to have a positive effect on the communication system must use that system to its fullest potential before resorting to the bypass. Otherwise the frequent use of bypassing can seriously reduce the operating effectiveness of that system. When the bypass does take place, it should be taken to a party in the organization structure who is outside the bypassers direct chain of command, who will be perceived as able to arbitrate or mediate effectively, and who will insure that the problem will be managed to the satisfaction of the triad involved and at the appropriate levels of the system.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has attempted to draw from direct contacts and from a representative sample of the literature some more clear and consistent view of bypassing and to combine it with concepts from the standard literature of organization theory and communication theory. The main effort has been to partially fill a gap in the available studies and to prepare the way for future efforts to study bypassing in the organization. As further studies are added, it should be possible to develop more effective methods for studying bypassing, and to test the recommended policies of this paper.

It is possible, for example, that additional information about bypassing could be obtained by using sociometric methods in much the same fashion that interaction in small groups has been studied. The quantitative data regarding some of these hypotheses might have been developed.

It did not seem likely that any of the available sociometric models would be appropriate to the organizational processes in this study, and the development of such models seemed beyond the practical limits of this thesis.

Another area for additional research which seems especially interesting involves the recent studies of "project management" or "matrix organizational systems." Very generally studies in this area seem to suggest that when the market and technological environment surrounding an organization is volatile, unstable or unpredictable, then an organization must modify its traditional structure to cope with the resulting problems. (See especially Lawrence and Lorsch, ff.) In such a system, important decision making might often be performed by people very low in the hierarchy, and bypassing of various kinds might be deliberately built into the system. Inquiry into this area would clearly proceed from a different perspective than that used in this study.

As in all research, the topic of bypassing can be connected to nearly all the standard concepts or concerns of organization communication. There are undoubtedly scores of additional research possibilities with potential in the questions raised in this study. The critical issue of all organization studies may well be how we manage to maintain productive, coordinated relationships between strongly independent individuals, and this study could obviously deal with only one small corner of that question.

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